



Monday, 07 March 2022

RESOLUTION OF CONFLICT IN UKRAINE MUST BE DURABLE AND LASTING

Dear Fellow South African,

In a world where far too many disputes between and within countries are settled through the barrel of a gun, the view that differences are best resolved through negotiation, dialogue and compromise may seem out of touch, and even fanciful.

And yet, as a country that attained democracy through a negotiated settlement, we remain steadfast in our conviction that achieving world peace through negotiation, and not force of arms, is indeed attainable.

This is a principle on which we have been consistent since the advent of our democracy, and which remains an important part of our foreign policy orientation.

South Africa abstained from voting in last week's United Nations resolution on the escalating conflict between Russia and its neighbour Ukraine because the resolution did not foreground the call for meaningful engagement.

Even prior to the resolution being passed at the UN last week, talks between Russian and Ukrainian officials had already started. South Africa expected that the UN resolution would foremost welcome the commencement of dialogue between the parties and seek to create the conditions for these talks to succeed. Instead, the call for peaceful resolution through political dialogue is relegated to a single sentence close to the conclusion of the final text. This does not provide the encouragement and international backing that the parties need to continue with their efforts.

Calling for peaceful negotiation is aligned with values upon which the UN was founded. We are particularly concerned that the UN Security Council was unable to discharge its responsibility to maintain peace and security. This gives impetus to the long standing calls for the Security Council's reform to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

The UN Charter enjoins member states to settle their disputes by peaceful means in the first instance, stating explicitly that parties to any dispute should first seek a solution by negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration and similar mechanisms. Since the outbreak of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, South Africa's position has been to affirm this call.

There have been some who have said that in abstaining from the vote condemning Russia's military operation in Ukraine, South Africa has placed itself on the wrong side of history. Yet, South Africa is firmly on the side of peace at a time when another war is something the world does not need, nor can it afford. The results of these hostilities will be felt globally and for many years to come.

A cessation of hostilities may indeed be achieved through force of arms or economic pressure, but it would be unlikely to lead to a sustainable and lasting peace.

The historical tensions between Russia and Ukraine make it all the more important that whatever agreements are brokered are sustainable in the long run and address the concerns of both parties to the conflict.

Our own experience with ending apartheid, and our country's role in mediating conflict elsewhere on the continent, have yielded a number of insights.

The first is that even the most seemingly intractable differences can be resolved at the negotiating table. The second is that even as talks may collapse, they can and do resume, as was the case in our own negotiating process. And that even when it seems the parties cannot see eye to eye, breakthroughs can and do happen.

That we continue to support the call for negotiation and dialogue does not render our commitment to human rights any less. Since the outbreak of the conflict we have expressed our concern at the impact of the conflict on civilians believing that war is not the solution to conflict and that it leads to human suffering.

Our country is committed to advancing the human rights and fundamental freedoms not only of our own people, but for the peoples of Palestine, Western Sahara, Afghanistan, Syria and across Africa and the world.

It is our hope that negotiations between Russia and Ukraine yield positive outcomes that pave the way for an end to the conflict.

Even though the pace of negotiations may proceed slowly, there is progress nonetheless. Every effort of the international community should be oriented towards supporting these talks, and to bringing the two sides together.

South Africa is greatly encouraged by the words of the UN Secretary-General António Guterres who said last week he would do everything in his power to contribute to an immediate cessation of hostilities and urgent negotiations for peace.

We all call upon Russia and the Ukraine to subject this conflict to mediation and do everything in their power to reach an agreement that will lead to the cessation of hostilities.

The peoples of Russia and Ukraine – two neighbours whose histories, peoples and fortunes are inextricably bound together – deserve a peace that is durable, sustainable and lasting.

With best regards,



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