



**STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY DR. HAGE G. GEINGOB,
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA AND CHAIRMAN OF
THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY, ON THE
OCCASION OF THE SADC SOLIDARITY CONFERENCE WITH
WESTERN SAHARA**

MARCH 26, 2019

PRETORIA, SOUTH AFRICA

Check against delivery

Your Excellency Cyril Ramaphosa, President of the Republic of South Africa and Host of the SADC Solidarity Conference with Western Sahara;

Your Excellencies, Heads of State and Government;

Your Excellencies, Former Heads of State and Government;

Honourable Ministers;

Your Excellency, Dr. Stergomena Lawrence Tax, SADC Executive Secretary;

Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps;

Distinguished Delegates;

Media fraternity;

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank His Excellency President Cyril Ramaphosa, the Government and the People of South Africa for accepting to host this landmark conference and for the wonderful hospitality accorded to my delegation and I, since our arrival here in the historic city of Tshwane.

In the same vein, I thank all Heads of State and Government and representatives from friendly countries for their presence here today.

We have gathered here, in the spirit of Pan Africanism, to reaffirm our solidarity for the people of Western Sahara, as they struggle for their inalienable right to self-determination and independence.

In this regard, allow me to quote the words of South African icon, the late Comrade Oliver Reginald Tambo, Former President of the ANC, when he addressed the 50th session of the OAU Coordinating Committee for the liberation of Africa, in Harare, Zimbabwe, on 13 May 1988.

Comrade Tambo stated that *"The objectives of the Committee will have become achievable because the OAU Coordinating Committee for the Liberation of Africa carried out its mandate, sweeping aside all obstacles to the emancipation of the peoples of Africa from the shores of the Mediterranean to the confluence of the Indian and Atlantic Oceans."*

Comrade Tambo envisioned the total Liberation of Africa from colonial occupation and oppression. Although many African countries have achieved this feat, Western Sahara remains occupied to this day.

It is therefore befitting that we have convened today in the O.R. Tambo Building, demonstrative of our concerted efforts towards an international solidarity in cause of freedom for the Sahrawi people.

The people of Africa are in the process of establishing “The Africa we Want” under our strategic framework for socio-economic transformation - Agenda 2063. We have explicitly outlined our seven aspirations under this framework, which are:

- 1. A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development**
- 2. An integrated continent, politically united and based on the ideals of Pan-Africanism and the vision of Africa’s Renaissance**
- 3. An Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law**
- 4. A peaceful and secure Africa**
- 5. An Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, shared values and ethics**

6. An Africa whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children

7. Africa as a strong, united and influential global player and partner

These aspirations will not be achieved in the absence of total freedom of all Africa's people.

The prolonged impasse on the Western Sahara issue will have grave consequences on the functioning of our Union. We can only move forward when freedom is guaranteed to all our citizens. As said by the revolutionary icon of Pan Africanism, Kwame Nkrumah, "Freedom is not something that one people can bestow on another as a gift. They claim it as their own and none can keep it from them."

Freedom is not a gift to the people of Western Sahara. It is a right. No one can bestow freedom on the Sahrawi people; for freedom is their birth right, which no one can keep from them and which they must claim as their own.

We should pause and ponder the question: why do the people of Western Sahara not enjoy freedom in the same manner as the rest of Africa's people?

I am aware of growing divisions on our continent on this issue. There is an agenda to divide and by so doing, render our

support for Western Sahara ineffective. These tactics were employed by countries which oppressed us and those who supported the inhumane oppression we endured. We are told that there is a parallel meeting being held in Morocco to coincide with our meeting here and some SADC members are there. We should therefore ask ourselves.

Are we, as SADC, united in support of the Sahrawi people in their fight for freedom and self-determination or do we need a new approach?

I remind this gathering that SADC was opposed to the admission of the Kingdom of Morocco into the AU fold. However, the majority of AU members felt it best for Morocco to be included in the AU fraternity so that we can discuss this issue as brothers and sisters.

Now that the Kingdom of Morocco has been admitted into the AU fraternity, we thought that we will work together, at African Union and United Nations level, to ensure that like all of us, the people of Western Sahara can enjoy their inalienable right to independence and self-determination.

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This past Saturday, March 23, we met at Cuito Cuanavale Angola to mark the inaugural commemoration of Southern

Africa Liberation Day and the anniversary of the Battle of Cuito Cuanavale, a defining moment in the history of our struggle for independence, when through solidarity, the brave men and women of the Cuban Revolutionary Forces, The People's Armed Forces of Liberation of Angola (FAPLA) and People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN), formed a tripartite coalition to achieve a victory which was the harbinger of the liberation of our region. We remembered the international wave of solidarity that helped push us towards the attainment of our freedom, thanks to the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, People's Republic of China and Democratic People's Republic of Korea, for the all-round political, military and material support and assistance rendered throughout our struggle for national liberation.

On the continental front, the leaders of the Frontline States and Nigeria provided invaluable and consistent support to our struggle together with the Scandinavian countries and many other friendly nations who were steadfast in providing political, diplomatic and material support to the liberation movements.

It is this solidarity and support that SWAPO received from the international community that enabled us to sustain our near 4-decade long resistance and struggle for liberation, until we emerged triumphant, celebrating our independence on March 21, 1990.

Last week, we celebrated our 29th Independence Anniversary, thanks to the blood of the fighters of Cuito Cuanavale, the sweat of our friends in Africa and the international community; and the tears of our forbearers, whose cries for freedom inspired the brave men and women of our liberation struggle.

Namibia therefore sympathizes with those who are denied their right to self-determination. We have a moral imperative to stand in solidarity with our Sahrawi Brothers and Sisters until their right to self-determination will be achieved.

We should therefore be determined to use this Conference, to rekindle the flames of Pan-African solidarity, which ignited the burning fire of liberation that swept across our region, resulting in the complete and total independence of Southern Africa.

Let us be committed and unwavering in our support to the people of Western Sahara. As we enjoy our hard earned freedom and democracy, so should the Sahrawi people.

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At this juncture, I wish to commend the AU Commission for its commitment towards the effective implementation of the Nouakchott decision, setting up the African Mechanism to

facilitate the search for a solution that is in line with the relevant decisions of the African Union and UN Security Council resolutions. SADC reaffirms its commitment to fully cooperate with all parties to support the African Mechanism.

Furthermore, we welcome and commend efforts by His Excellency Horst Kohler, former President of Germany and UN Secretary General's Personal Envoy for Western Sahara, who has initiated negotiations between the Kingdom of Morocco and the POLISARIO Front. We support his efforts and endeavour to continue working with him in line with the UN settlement plan on Western Sahara.

This Conference is an affirmation of the importance we attach to the plight of the people of Western Sahara to achieve their inalienable rights to freedom. The international community should continue to support efforts aimed at resolving once and for all the question of Western Sahara, the last colony on the Continent, to hold a free and fair referendum to determine their destiny. The decolonization of Africa will not be complete until the day the people of Western Sahara decide the fate of their future status, through a free and fair referendum.

Distinguished Delegates,

The Africa We Want, is an Africa which is characterised by peace, stability and unity.

These are the prerequisites for the pursuit of our aspirations, which can only be achieved through the establishment of a united and integrated African continent.

Therefore, our call for the freedom of the people of Western Sahara is not aimed at dividing the continent; instead, it is aimed at fulfilling the dreams of Africa's founding fathers; extraordinary personalities like Julius Kamabage Nyerere who believed that, "No nation has the right to make decisions for another nation; no people for another people."

Let us bring to fruition, the dream of our Founding Fathers, let us build a free, united and prosperous African House. An Africa House in which the people of Western Sahara will enjoy the freedom to pursue their aspirations and thereby regain their dignity.

I wish to thank you all for honouring this invitation; your presence today is testament to our unity of purpose.

Once more, I reaffirm on behalf of the Republic of Namibia and of SADC, our full and unequivocal support for the democratic rights of the People of Western Sahara to self-determination and national independence.

It is now my pleasure, to declare the SADC Solidarity Conference with Western Sahara officially open.

Thank you.