

SPEECH BY SPEAKER MAX SISULU (MP), ON THE OCCASION OF THE PARLIAMENTARY MEETING ON COP 17/CMP7, DURBAN, SOUTH AFRICA, 5 DECEMBER 2011.

Honourable Dr Ghurirab, Honorary President of the IPU
Honourable MJ Mahlangu, Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces
Honourable Ms Thandi Memela, Deputy Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces
Ms Margareta Wahlstrom, Special Representative of the United Nations and Secretary- General on Disaster Reduction
Dr Agostino Zacharias of the United Nations Development Programme Africa Bureau
Fellow parliamentarians,
IPU Secretary General, Mr Anders Johnson
Invited Guests

I warmly welcome you to Durban and to this parliamentary gathering on the occasion of the Conference of the Parties (COP 17).

I wish to thank the leadership of the Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) who has worked closely with the South African Parliament in preparing this joint event.

I also wish to thank the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for partnering with us to host this event.

The much anticipated Durban session of the UN Climate Change Conference is well underway.

We trust that governments will rise to the mammoth tasks before them to meet the expectations of millions around the world whose livelihoods depend on there being progress in the climate change negotiations.

The Durban, COP 17 conference is a crucial test of the willingness of our leaders to look beyond narrow national and short- term interests.

Climate change if left unabated is threatening the basic foundation – the very stability on which humanity has built its existence.

The world is already experiencing the effects and impact of climate change first hand.

Already, one-third of all people in Africa live in drought-prone regions. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) estimates that by 2050, up to 600 million Africans will be at risk of water stress.

Reduced water supply and growing water demand is leading to increasing competition among different sectors of society, different communities and different countries.

On a global level, increasingly, unpredictable weather patterns are leading to falling agricultural production, higher food prices, and food insecurity.

In Africa, crop yields could decline by as much as 50% by 2020. Recent experiences around the world clearly show how such situations can cause political instability and undermine the performance of already fragile states.

Changes in sea-level, more frequent and more severe natural disasters and water shortages are causing large-scale, destabilizing population movements, as witnessed in Somalia and Ethiopia.

All these factors taken together suggest that climate change, especially if left unabated threatens to increase poverty and overwhelm the capacity of governments to meet the basic needs of their people, which could well contribute to the emergence, spread and longevity of conflict.

Africa therefore speaks with one unified, coherent and strong voice on climate change. In support of the African agenda for a just and equitable solution to climate change, the region continues to be led and represented by one delegation.

The Africa common position on climate change reflects the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities for climate change as stipulated in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

This position argues for more ambitious, quantified and legally binding emission reduction commitments for developed countries, without imposing similar obligations on developing countries.

Africa is arguing for a climate regime based on the recognition that solving the problem of climate change will only be possible if it is undertaken in the context of developing countries' priorities of achieving poverty eradication and sustainable development.

The African position stresses the importance of implementing climate change adaptation and mitigation programmes in a manner that will help achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and broader developmental goals.

Africa has called for developed countries to show leadership by raising their level of ambition to a scale required by science and equity.

As Africans we are concerned about the slow disbursement of the financial resources pledged by Parties as "fast start" finance. We have therefore called on developed nations to honour their commitments. Remember, a promise made is a promise kept

Africa has called for climate finance to be predictable, sustainable, adequate and additional to the development aid it currently receives. We have also called for the Green Fund to be implemented as a matter of urgency.

With COP17, the Kyoto Protocol first commitment period will be coming to an end. The reluctance of developed countries to honour their mitigation commitments for a second and subsequent commitment periods is disappointing and very worrying.

The Africa position has stressed the urgency for a second commitment period to avoid any gaps between commitment periods.

The world cannot be held hostage by a handful of countries! We must move forward with speed!

South Africa's position at COP 17, has been guided by our desire to reach an ambitious, comprehensive and equitable outcome at the Durban negotiations.

South Africa has taken bold action by making historic and voluntary commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, investing in green energy and green jobs and by introducing comprehensive legislation to transform to a clean energy economy.

These actions are ambitious, and our government is embarking on them not simply to meet our global responsibilities. We are convinced that changing the way we produce and use energy is essential to South Africa's economic future.

Last year, in Cancun, Mexico, Dr Ghurirab challenged the world's Parliaments to do more on climate change when he stated:

"We cannot sit idly by and wait for negotiators to reach binding global agreements. Instead, we should seize the initiative and legislate change and exercise oversight".

In this regard, the South African Parliament, has taken bold steps in support of development and climate change.

We have done this in multiple ways in our daily parliamentary work. This includes amongst others-

- Through the mainstreaming of climate change into the work of all Portfolio Committees;
- Awareness and advocacy training for members of Parliament and staff;
- National consultative seminars bringing together key stakeholders, in government and civil society;
- Ongoing engagement with government;
- Scrutiny of departmental budgets;
- Development of a toolkit on climate change;
- Debates, questions and Member Statements and;
- The building of partnerships with civil society.

Mr President

The voices of Parliamentarians as the representatives of the people we serve are the strongest voices of persuasion at local, national, regional and international level.

We must use this leverage to bring about positive action and positive change. As Parliamentarians we must ensure that we are the centre of the dialogue on climate change at all times.

Let us also send a clear message from the global parliamentary community to COP17, through the declaration on climate change, and let us use this Declaration as a platform for future work on climate change.

I wish to conclude with the words of President Zuma, who recently stated at an Inter- Ministerial meeting in Johannesburg, South Africa:

Ordinary people that suffer from the impact of climate change hold high expectations from their leaders. They want leaders to be responsible and to find effective solutions to the threat that climate change presents to their livelihoods, quality of life, dignity, and in many cases, their survival.

Let us turn the climate crisis into opportunities. Let us save tomorrow, today.

Once again, a very heartfelt and warm welcome to Durban, South Africa.