

Remarks by President Jacob Zuma to the 24th Congress of the Socialist International

31 August 2012

The President of the Socialist International, Comrade Papendrou;
Secretary General of the Socialist International, Comrade Ayala;
Heads of State and Government and Leaders of the Socialist
International member countries;
Delegates from various organisations aligned to the Socialist International;
Distinguished participants,
Comrades and friends;

We extend a warm and revolutionary welcome to South Africa, to all comrades and friends in this 24th congress of the Socialist International.

As Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe pointed out when he welcomed you on our behalf yesterday, South Africa is honoured to host this congress, which brings together the progressive forces from around the world.

The ANC regards the Socialist International as a crucial forum for the mobilisation of the world progressive movement around issues of a better Africa and a better world.

We are particularly proud to host this event during the year that marks the centenary of the African National Congress.

The ANC has been an internationalist organisation since its inception.

The founders of our movement recognised that the struggle of the people of South Africa was an inseparable part of the continental and global struggle against colonialism.

Building on this foundation, the progressive forces of South Africa have played an active role in continental and international movements.

It was this internationalist approach and outlook that contributed to the building of the global anti-apartheid movement.

Many of the forces who were part of this movement joined us in January this year in Mangaung in celebration of the ANC centenary. We thank you profoundly for attending the centenary celebrations.

We also extend our gratitude once again most sincerely to all, for the solidarity with the oppressed South African masses during the struggle against colonial oppression and apartheid by many member parties of the Socialist International.

As a national liberation movement in government since 1994, the ANC continues to place great emphasis on internationalism, with a view to contribute to the struggle to create a better Africa and world.

In October this year, we will be hosting an international solidarity conference, during which we will also honour our former President Oliver Reginald Tambo, who played a major leading role to enhance and shape the ANC's international outlook and international mobilisation.

We look forward to seeing many of you back in South Africa for that historic conference.

Comrades and friends,

The founders of the Socialist International formed this international union as 'an international movement for freedom, social justice and solidarity.'

At this 24th Congress of the Socialist International, we must reflect deeply on this mission and vision against the challenges facing humanity today.

We need to reflect on how to respond to global challenges effectively as the Socialist International, in line with the theme of this congress, the New Internationalism and a New Culture of Solidarity.

The challenges we face arise in the context of the last two decades of globalisation and its impact especially on the developing world.

At a positive level, globalisation has encouraged national developmental initiatives by countries of the South.

This has seen the beginning of a shift in global economic power. The success of countries such as India, China and Brazil to become key economic players globally demonstrate the possibilities of advancement for the developing world.

The world has also benefitted from the introduction of new technologies and knowledge to provide solutions to many of the problems of humanity, such as health, agricultural production, climate change and education. Leaving the gains aside, the fact remains that three quarters of the global population have become losers in the globalisation process, and are victims of deepening poverty and inequality.

There are many reasons for this state of affairs. The dominant imperialist powers have historically used various means to assert their geo-political and economic interests. On the economic front, globalisation has consolidated the power of the dominant global forces, including powerful transnational corporations which control trillions of dollars around the world.

At a political level, the world has also had to face the continued tendencies of powerful nations to dictate to others how they should run their affairs.

Militarism is becoming a more common option whenever the world needs to resolve conflicts, causing global instability.

This undermines possibilities for lasting solutions that are in the interest of the populations facing conflicts. We have seen this in Africa, with Libya being a recent case. It has happened in other parts of the globe as well.

We need to find a way to make the Socialist International more effective in support of multilateralism as the best instrument in pursuit of a better world and international solidarity, instead of unilateralism which is on the rise.

At a social level, we should interrogate at the gender aspects of globalisation as it affects men and women differently.

Firstly, across the globe, women are entering the work forces in larger numbers. However, their participation tends to be in the informal and outsourced sectors and in the caring professions.

These sectors are characterised by shift work, labour flexibility and therefore job insecurity, low wages and poor working conditions and benefits.

Thus, we see the majority of women swelling the ranks of the working poor, in addition to the unpaid and subsistence work they provide in their families and communities.

A second trend is the feminisation of poverty. About 70% of the world's poor are female. They are likely to stay poor and therefore adding to the cycle of inter-generational poverty.

When emerging economy governments begin to privatise under pressure, women tend to suffer most.

As Mary Hawkesworth indicates in her book *Globalisation and Feminist Activism*, the reduction in the number of state employees affects women disproportionately as they tend to be the ones working in social welfare agencies, schools and hospitals. She points out that the parts of the state that are not negatively affected by privatisation tend to be male dominated such as the police, military, commerce and finances.

“Additionally, the loss of jobs in the formal..economy tends to push women into the informal sector...with low pay and no recognition.”

With regards to the impact of globalisation on the youth, the information and communication revolution has opened a whole new exciting world to young people.

But at a much deeper level, the Successive ILO Global Employment Trends for Youth reports, draw attention to the worsening labour market situation of young people.

One in three young people between the ages of 18 and 24 are unemployed, and the rate of youth unemployment remains consistent at three times that of the rate for adults.

Youth unemployment is therefore a global challenge that needs to be responded to effectively by addressing the fundamental contradictions in the capitalist system.

Comrades and friends,

In light of these and many other challenges, the current global situation dictates that we should emerge with radical positions, a radical agenda and the re-characterisation of the Socialist International as one of the major remaining global progressive movements.

We have no choice but to review, analyse and rethink, having taken stock of the global crises, their impact on society in particular to the working masses of the world.

The Socialist Council meeting in Costa Rica earlier this year urged the organisation to contribute towards redefining markets in a democracy, in order to address the contradictions that were causing the deepening poverty and hunger. Proposals were made regarding the need to redesign the global financial architecture, especially the reform of institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

Other measures include better regulation, the promotion of sustainable growth and the strengthening of social protection as more crucial than ever before.

These proposals need our serious attention.

More importantly, we must ask the fundamental questions about how we can advance the interest of humanity through strengthening the Socialist International.

A key ingredient in building the Socialist International, is to foster unity and meaningful cooperation among the socialists, social democrats and all disciplined forces of the left around the world, whether in or outside of governments.

We recall that the Socialist International of the 1970's, championed a shift in direction and orientation. The movement was rejuvenated, and started reaching out, both organisationally and in terms of its outlook and agenda, to forces beyond the borders of Europe.

It became an ally of the progressive and anti-colonial forces across the globe in their struggle for freedom from oppression and domination and for self-determination.

Over the last two decades, further strides have been made to expand the membership of the Socialist International in all regions of the world, including on the African continent.

The organisation also began engaging with North-South issues and participated actively in the struggle for the transformation of the global order.

It also began to be active as a global player involved, for example, in the resolution of the Middle East conflict, as well as in the regional integration efforts in different parts of the world.

However, we must also acknowledge that there are progressive political parties and movements in the world, most notably in Latin America, Africa and Asia, who do not see themselves as part of the family of the Socialist International.

We must continue to ask the question why this is the case, but more generally, to examine the state of global progressive and left forces. It is generally acknowledged that the shifts in the global situation over the last decade or so have opened greater space for progressive alternatives.

However, many amongst the broad global left have either abandoned left projects and ideas after the collapse of the many socialist countries which included the Soviet Union, or have been slow to make use of the space and provide alternative visions. As the Socialist

International, we should examine the contribution we make to this search for global progressive alternatives.

We cannot be silent and allow an intellectual and moral vacuum by the absence of robust and compelling alternatives to neo-liberalism.

We have to build on some gains scored around the world. In Europe, Socialist and Social Democratic parties are once again taking on the helm of government.

We must ensure that this process is consolidated, by providing real answers – as the progressive did after the Great Depression – to the problems their countries and the world face.

On the African continent and the Middle East we see that even where advances are made in overthrowing authoritarian regimes, as it happened during the Arab Spring, the progressive forces are often unable to ensure that these activities result in more sovereign, democratic and people-centred forms of government and political and economic systems.

What may happen, without guidance from progressive forces, is a degeneration into new forms of authoritarianism and reversing gains with regards to gender equality and the right to self-determination.

With the Socialist International meeting in Africa, we must also reflect on how to build on the gains in Africa over the years.

The progressive forces that include old national liberation forces and newly emerged progressive parties; the workers, women, youth and other movements are growing.

For example the ANC has grown from about 600 000 members in 2007 to more than a million members currently.

However, the growth of progressive parties in the continent needs to be strengthened so that they take their proper place in the development of the continent within the broader goal of the African agenda.

The core attributes of such a progressive agenda should in the main include: consistent political freedom, modernisation of African productive forces, regional integration including through infrastructure and improvement in the socio-economic conditions of African citizens.

Towards achieving these goals, the African continent is implementing the New Partnership on African Development (NEPAD).

This includes important decisions that have been taken to expand continental agricultural production, regional integration and infrastructure development.

Based on our own analysis of the performance of progressive forces in the continent, we have seen a need to revive party to party relations more actively. The experience of the post-liberation period is that intergovernmental relations become the key and possibly the only form of interaction, thereby killing political content in the relations between and among African countries.

Active party to party linkages will greatly improve our response to the challenges facing the continent.

It is in the context of these challenges we face as members of the Socialist International, that we should locate the on-going debates about the reform of the Socialist International, in order to promote the new internationalism and a new culture of solidarity.

These reforms must have the effect of broadening the base of the Socialist International and of strengthening its capacity to generate, fight for and implement progressive ideas and a progressive agenda around the world.

We extend a warm welcome again to all our distinguished guests and participants. We sincerely thank you for hosting a Socialist International congress in our country for the first time.

We look forward to a fruitful engagement and exchange of ideas on many weighty issues on the agenda.

We have a responsibility to take the Socialist International to greater heights as it unites the progressive forces to deal with the challenges of a changing world.

I Thank you.