



**EMBASSY OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA
BUSINESS ROUND TABLE – WEDNESDAY 13 FEBRUARY 2019**

**INTRODUCTORY NOTES DELIVERED BY THE ACTING
HEAD OF MISSION, MS ANTHEA JOUBERT**



Quote:

**Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

On behalf of the Republic of South Africa, I wish to welcome you to the fifth Business Round Table that this Embassy is hosting in Mexico since its inception in April 2017 – number 3 in Mexico City.

Thank you for joining us this morning.

A special word of welcome to the South African Honorary Consuls in Guadalajara and Cancun in Mexico and in Costa Rica, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala and Panama in Central America who joined us via our Skype link.

It will be recalled that the original date set for this meeting was 17 January – not only to wish you all a happy new year but also within the hope to be able to introduce you to the new South African Ambassador to Mexico and Central America.

The date was postponed to today, once again hoping that this new introduction would be possible. Due to bureaucratic systems, this is not possible today.

The forthcoming 25th Freedom Day anniversary in April, should give us this honour to introduce the Ambassador in person to you.

It will be recalled that during the previous meetings and through bilaterals held at the Embassy, major challenges for bilateral trade and investment were identified – in particular the fact that vibrant bilateral trade and investment agreements between our countries are lacking, that visa regimes are impeding a free flow of people to do business, that we are physically far apart – for the movement of goods, services and people that will make trade work.

It will be recalled that South Africa had a change of leadership in February 2018 – exactly a year ago – when President Cyril Ramaphosa took over the Presidency and appointed a new cabinet.

President Ramaphosa and his Cabinet and special advisers from different sectors – including our former Ambassador to Mexico and Central America, Advocate Sandile Nogxina, have set as agenda the revitalisation of the South African economy and address socio-economic and socio-political challenges in the country.

In a nutshell, the ills of certain malpractices and state capture of government departments and state owned enterprises and private sector investments that were over ambitious, had to be addressed.

President Ramaphosa and his chosen team identified the following urgent needs to ensure a better South Africa that can stand proud in the world:

- Address corruption
- Address unemployed and unskilled youth needs
- Address bankrupt state owned enterprises and utilities
 - with a focus on the national airline, South African Airways,
 - ESKOM, the country's energy utility – without electricity and power everyone in the country is stranded
 - DENEL, the country's once state of the art arms industry that has fallen behind times and
 - The former network of steel manufacturing – known as ISCOR. This utility was privatized but unfortunately this process has not been a positive experience.
 - The South African mining industry needs careful attention in a very fickle and expensive environment.
 - Address security, land reform demand promises made and not honoured, aging infrastructure and lastly
 - Beyond control – climate change and the devastating droughts that South Africa has been experiencing – a water and energy hungry population is restive.

President Ramaphosa acknowledged – as an experienced trade unionist, politician, respected international businessman, leader and grassroots person – that urgent remedies need to be put into place as local, regional and international trade and inward investment is needed with the support of the entire South African population to re-energize and revitalise the country – the African gateway at the southern tip of Africa.

A team of investment ambassadors was created with as immediate instruction – travel the country, the countries of traditional trade and new vistas to assess trade and investment potential. The Team – all working on a pro-bono basis – are bankers, business people and academicians – respected in their fields and representing the entire country's population.

A number of major events flowed from these visits, processes of dialogue and identification of challenges.

I name but a few:

In May 2018 – a Job Summit was held – to address the issues of unemployment, to remedy the need for relevant skills training, education – in particular that of an unemployed youth.

In July 2018 – hosting of the 10th BRICS Summit in South Africa – with in particular a focus on the African Outreach Programme whereby the member states of BRICS through its Economic Development Bank, could move closer to funding urgently needed infrastructure and education programmes not only in our country but within the Southern African region and African Continentally wide.

In October 2018 – an Investment Summit was held – to address the investment needs of South Africa – and not only inspire foreign direct investment, but also to bring into the fold, South African money and expertise that has over time moved into the shadows. The support and interest generated was and is overwhelming.

Over the past months South Africa participated in the Africa-China Summit hosted by China; the G20 Summit hosted by Argentina, the Africa-European Union Summit held in Berlin and attended the annual World Economic Forum in Davos. All platforms used by President Ramaphosa and his Team to inspire and attract trade and investment to our country.

The past weekend the 6th monthly African Union Summit held in Addis Ababa was attended – with Egypt taking over the Chair of the Union for the year 2019,

with South Africa chosen to take over the Chair for 2020 and host that year's June/ July Summit.

Of particular importance to note of this past Summit is its focus on migration, refugees, its challenges and human rights and then the acceptance of the African Continent to enact the agreed to Continental Free Trade Agreement. South Africa, along with 16 countries, presented its ratification of the Agreement to Summit. 22 Member States out of 55 are needed to make this long awaited dream of free trade and movement from the Cape to Cairo possible. We trust this will happen in the very near future.

It will also give you, as business leaders and investors and country representatives access to a vast African Continental Market, once in place – through North Africa, through East and West Africa and through Southern Africa.

President Ramaphosa with his team of investment and trade ambassadors, the Ministers of International Relations and Cooperation, Trade and Industry and Finance, and a host of experts have been leading in these engagements to assure the fickle South African and international financial and trade world – South Africa is a vibrant country open for business.

Last week, President Ramaphosa delivered his State of the Nation Address in Cape Town, opening the last session of this Parliament before the country goes to elections on 8 May 2019. Our Minister of Finance will deliver his annual budget speech on Wednesday 20 February to ensure that the country is financially country afloat, as we go into election mode.

The key message of our President was to reaffirm his acknowledgement of South African challenges – as mentioned – his acknowledgement that a better and safe and stable country is essential and that the dream of President Nelson Mandela of a free, democratic, humane and respected country and peoples be revisited and implemented.

The entire population of the country, the history of struggle and sacrifice, a legacy of enriching state enterprises that educate, skill and enrich our people – need to be served by the outgoing and to be chosen new government on 8 May 2019.

With a limited time frame – and with much to be shared, it gives me great pleasure to do four things:

1. Give Mr Adriaan Du Pisanie, First Secretary: Political and astute economist the opportunity to enhance South Africa's needs, and our bilateral trade and

investment opportunities – with Mexico, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Honduras and Panama.

2. To introduce to you a vibrant platform of information – the South African Embassy website that gives at your fingertips information on what South Africa has to offer as trading partner and investment partner – both inbound into our southern land and outbound to Mexico and Central America. Thank you Mr Guillermo Prior for your dedication to make this tool accessible to all interested parties in both English and Spanish.
3. To give appreciated Embassy friends of El Financiero, to introduce their proposals for a dedicated supplement on South Africa and to deliver their perspectives of the Mexican Economy.

And

4. To ask you to introduce yourselves around this table indicating your fields of interest and your challenges in bilateral economic relations.

I wish you all a fruitful time of interaction around our table.

Thank you for your time,

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