

Welcoming address by Deputy President of the ANC Kgalema Motlanthe during the 24th Congress of the Socialist International

30 August 2012

The President of the Socialist International, Comrade George Papandreou;
Secretary-General, Comrade Luis Ayala;
Leaders of Delegations;
Members of the Diplomatic Corps;
Dear Delegates;
Comrades and Friends:

Thank you for converging on our continent for the 24th Congress of the Socialist International.

On behalf of our organisation, the African National Congress (ANC), our democratic government and our nation, I wish to welcome you all and hope that in the brief spell of time that you are here you will find our country and its people warm, friendly and welcoming.

I would also like to convey President Jacob Zuma`s apology for not being able to open this congress. Contingency matters beyond his control have made it impossible for him to be with us at this point in time. He will, however, catch up with the proceedings later on.

As you will have noted the four years since the 23rd Congress of the Socialist International in Athens, Greece in 2008, have seen economic turbulence of global dimensions.

The global financial crisis which soon escalated into global economic meltdown has since worsened the social conditions of many across the globe, especially in the developing countries. In consequence this makes the need for this congress to come out with a clear-minded way forward even more urgent.

It is worth noting that this Congress of the Socialist International is taking place on the soil of the African continent for the first time in its existence.

In and of itself this 24th Congress of the Socialist International is truly historic and reflective of its internationalist character.

It is equally noteworthy that this Congress of the Socialist International is taking place in South Africa in the year that our liberation movement, the ANC, is celebrating hundred years of existence as the leading force in the liberation of our people from both colonial and apartheid oppression.

Consequently, I wish to express our gratitude, once again from the continental viewpoint, for the solid support the Socialist International provided and continue to provide to the struggles of the African people against colonialism and racism.

This fact makes the 24th Congress of the Socialist International all the more historically resonant as our centennial celebrations are not only for us as South Africans but for the progressive world at large that believes that the future of humanity lies in equality, democracy, justice and progress, irrespective of race, sex, class, religion or region.

We are confident that the same progressive spirit will continue to mobilise the energies of the Socialist International to continue supporting democratic and development efforts on our continent with the view to improving the African condition.

It is our contention that so long as under-development- including communicable diseases, high mortality rates, illiteracy and neo-colonial relations- remain in place, for so long shall high-minded principles such as democracy ring hollow, with no tangible benefits for the poor in both the developing and developed world.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Indeed internationalism has for decades been an integral part of the political outlook and approach of the ANC, since its inception.

We have always recognised the fact that our struggle was an inseparable part of the anti-colonial movement on our continent and globally.

Similarly, the founders of the Socialist International, inspired by the desire to change the world for the better, formed this international movement for freedom, social justice and solidarity.

As such, our membership of the Socialist International derives from this substantive commonality of principles and objectives.

It also derives from the understanding that it is our responsibility to work with other organisations which pursue progressive governance, improvement of the quality of life of all, democratic reform of multilateral agencies and the pursuit of the renaissance of the African continent.

Even in the post-apartheid era the ANC continues to place great emphasis on internationalism, with a view to contribute to the struggle to create a better Africa and a humane world. At the core of this are our objectives to:

- Build a just and equitable world order;
- Mobilise world co-operation and solidarity in the quest for the improvement of the quality of life of Africans, people in developing countries and the poor of the world; and
- Position South Africa as a reliable and principled partner in the global efforts to attain peace, freedom and prosperity for all.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At this 24th Congress of the Socialist International, we must continue to reflect on the challenges facing humanity today.

These challenges arise in the context of the last two decades of globalisation, with its advances in information communications technology as well as the globalisation of production and capital.

At the same time, the unfolding process of globalisation has consolidated and expanded the power of the dominant global forces.

These include transnational corporations controlling trillions of dollars of humanity's wealth and the western powers' real or imagined tendency to seek to impose their will on others.

It also entails cultural domination reflected in trends towards homogenisation of media content and the arts.

A critical consequence of all this is the undermining of the system of global governance.

Dear delegates,

As a result of the globalisation landscape delineated above, the ANC sees the Socialist International as an important forum for the mobilisation of the world progressive movement around issues of a better world and a better Africa.

In this regard we would do well to remember that the Socialist International emerged as an organisation of the working class pursuing their liberation and that of all working people from exploitation. It also adopted a stance opposed to colonial domination.

Its goal is to achieve a peaceful world where these basic values can be enhanced and where each individual can live a meaningful life with full development of his or her personality and talents and with the guarantee of human and civil rights in a democratic framework of society.

Poverty, inequality and levels of high unemployment are prevalent in the developing countries, and now visible even in the first world due to the global crises.

Therefore this leaves us with no choice but to review, analyse and rethink the impact of the global crises on society and the toiling masses of the world. Among others, we should consider how we can engage and mobilise other sectors within the progressive movement, such as the youth, women, labour, as well as the religious sector as family members.

In addition we should mobilise the social movements and the progressive civil society in pursuance of a common agenda of the better managed and humane world order.

The global crisis of capitalism and imperialism, which is negatively affecting growth, widening social inequality, increasing levels of poverty and worsening employment figures, needs a sharpened, radical shift in the approach the Socialist International takes.

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 itself. 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 to advance the four themes that constitute the focus of deliberations in this congress.

These read as follows:

- For an economy with jobs, growth and social protection: the social democratic response to the financial crisis;

- The struggle for rights and freedoms: strengthening representative democracy and gaining new democracies in the world;
- For a common road to peace, sustainability and cooperation: the need to secure multilateralism; and
- For a new internationalism and a new culture of solidarity among people and between nations.

In this regard the 24th Congress of the Socialist International would do well to reflect on a number of areas of concern within the context of its stated themes. These would include issues and questions such as:

- Responding to the calls to redefine the role of the Socialist International with regards to its ideological orientation and outlook, defining what it means to be an `international movement for freedom, social justice and solidarity` in the realities of today`s world.
- How does the Socialist International`s ideological posture assist it to attract a broader range of left, progressive and social forces to its ranks so that it is able to unite progressive forces into an effective instrument for social change in the world?
- What are the key organisational reforms that will enable the Socialist International to become the vibrant, progressive agent for change we seek to build?
- The Youth and Women`s Unions should be given ex-officio voting status in the Socialist International, to ensure that voices of these two critical sectors are heard, as a way of building women leadership and as a training ground for new generations of socialists.
- Experience has amply demonstrated over the years that peace and stability are the ineluctable pre-conditions for economic and social development in many under-developed parts of the globe, especially the Middle East and Africa. Conditions of violence and conflict destroy infrastructure and undermine long term economic stability of nations, leaving desolation and retrogression in their wake. This in itself places huge responsibility on our shoulders as the Socialist International to strive for conflict resolution with the view to securing conditions of development, peace and ultimately a humane world. In this connection, the transformation of the United Nations organs, particularly its Security Council, is one of the ways available to us to advance this vision by making the mandate of such organs more responsive through broader representativity of its member states.

I am confident that as we engage in this 24th Congress of the Socialist International, it would help to debate these issues so that we emerge from this conference with a clearer vision to tackle the debilitating conditions affecting more than half the population of the world. In this regard we look forward to fruitful discussions and exchange of ideas on these issues.

As we say in South Africa, working together, in solidarity, we can do more!!!

With these words I declare the 24th Congress of the Socialist International open!!!!

Thank you