


Minister Ronald Lamola: Budget Vote 2026/27 delivered by the Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Mr Ronald O Lamola, MP, in Parliament, Cape Town, 26 May 2026

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House Chairperson, Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee Honourable Supra Mahumapelo Honourable Members,

I have the honour to present Budget Vote 6 of the Department of International Relations and Cooperation on a day that carries the weight and indeed the deep contradictions, of our history.

Seventy-eight years ago, on 26 May 1948, in an electoral system reserved exclusively for white voters, the National Party won the majority of seats in the House of Assembly.

That victory paved the way for the legislative machinery of apartheid, intensifying racial segregation and stripping most of the people of this land of their rights and freedoms.

The scars of that machinery are still visible in our society today. Its fault lines continue to mark where people live, how they move, what opportunities they can access and how freedom is experienced in daily life.

Not far from us is District Six, a living day reminder of the effects the Group Areas Act.

President Nelson Mandela later characterised our country's situation with unmatched clarity when he described us country that was:

“a pariah among the nations, a detestable example of what is impermissible in the ordering of human relations and the homeland of a crime against humanity.”

Honourable Members, this week also carries the triumphant weight of history.

On 25 May 1994, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 919, terminating the arms embargo and ending the remaining sanctions against South Africa.

This marked the end of South Africa's isolation following the 1994 democratic elections. It also marked our democratic nation's formal admission to the family of

nations.

It is also fitting that yesterday, 25 May, we marked Africa Day.

Indeed, Honourable Members, as we table this budget of R 7,227,000,000 for 2026/27, we do so with full awareness of this history.

It is a history of pain whose consequences remain with us, and a history of victory that gave our democracy a great responsibility: to conduct a foreign policy anchored in Ubuntu, justice, international law, dialogue, multilateralism and the needs of our region and our continent.

In the 32 years of our democratic dispensation, successive democratically elected legislatures have been at the centre of concretising the achievement of equality, through legislative and other measures designed to protect or advance persons, or categories of persons, disadvantaged by unfair discrimination.

This task is especially important in the world we face today.

We table this budget at a time when international cooperation is under sustained pressure from unilateralism, economic coercion, wars of aggression, deals of extraction and a winner-takes-all approach to global relations. South Africa cannot afford to shed the responsibilities that come with its history.

Our freedom is a product of international solidarity, South Africa must, in this moment, continue to discharge three tasks towards a better Africa and a better world.

Africa is the centrepiece of our foreign policy; our first task is to advance the interests and voice of the African continent.

This task begins with the pursuit of a stable, integrated and economically resilient Africa. Our diplomacy across the continent promotes bilateral relations, deepens regional cooperation and aligns our collective efforts around shared development priorities.

As Chair of the AU Ministerial Committee on the Follow-up and Implementation of Agenda 2063, South Africa has a responsibility to support the continent's Decade of Acceleration with greater urgency, stronger institutions, and shared ownership of Africa's development agenda.

Our nomination to the Committee of Heads of State and Government on the Implementation of the AfCFTA also reflects confidence in South Africa's commitment to continental economic integration.

The AfCFTA must become a practical instrument for expanding intra-African trade, building regional value chains, advancing industrialisation and creating jobs.

The AfCFTA has the potential for a common market of 3.4 trillion US Dollars and a pathway to diversification, reduced dependence on external markets and greater resilience for our economies.

Yet intra-African trade remains too low, at just 16% for the continent and 21% for SADC. This is far below Europe at 68% and Asia at 59%.

Africa's trade is also still heavily concentrated outside the continent. Over 50% of the continent's imports and exports are tied to just five economies, all outside of Africa.

This is the source of our vulnerability to external shocks. It is also why regional integration must move from aspiration to implementation.

Honourable Members,

I have recently hosted the SADC Ministers of Foreign Affairs Retreat in Skukuza, Kruger National Park, where Ministers reflected on the geopolitical developments affecting our region.

The Ministers agreed that SADC must be better prepared to respond to external shocks, whether they arise from conflict, climate disasters, food and fuel price volatility, public health emergencies or the decisions of powerful actors far beyond our borders.

Our region is home to 30% of the world's proven critical mineral reserves. We are also home to approximately 50% of the world's cobalt reserves, 20% of the world's graphite reserves and 10% of the world's copper reserves. These resources, if harnessed properly, can propel our region's structural transformation.

Countries in our region, including South Africa, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Namibia and Tanzania, are taking bold policy steps to ensure that mineral endowments support development.

When South Africa assumes the full Chairship of SADC in August 2026, our priorities will include deepening political cohesion, consolidating the SADC Free Trade Area, reducing non-tariff barriers and building regional value chains in agro-processing, critical minerals beneficiation, pharmaceuticals and other strategic sectors.

Honourable Members, an integrated Africa cannot be built on conflict and instability. That is why our continental task also extends to peace and security.

South Africa serves on the AU Peace and Security Council at a time when parts of the continent continue to face armed conflict, unconstitutional changes of government, terrorism, violent extremism and transnational organised crime.

In the Great Lakes Region, we continue to support efforts towards a political solution to the conflict in eastern DRC. In South Sudan, we continue to support dialogue, institutional reform and the full implementation of the Revitalised Peace Agreement.

South Africa also maintains its principled support for the right of the people of Western Sahara to self-determination, in line with international law and United Nations resolutions.

In all these areas, South Africa discharges its responsibility through diplomacy, mediation, regional solidarity and a firm belief that Africa must shape its own future.

Our second task is to champion the reform of global governance and defend international cooperation.

The world is changing, but many of its institutions still reflect old patterns of power. Developing countries continue to face unsustainable debt, unequal access to development finance and growing pressure to align with powerful geopolitical blocs.

South Africa's responsibility is to advance a fairer and more representative global order. This means continuing to call for reform of the United Nations, especially the Security Council, so that it can respond more effectively to contemporary global challenges.

South Africa's G20 Presidency, under the theme *Solidarity, Equality, Sustainability*, gave expression to this responsibility.

Among the important outcomes of our Presidency were two major reports:

The G20 Africa Expert Panel Report on Growth, Debt and Development.

The Report of the G20 Extraordinary Committee of Independent Experts on Global Inequality.

We continue to work with partners, including the AU, Brazil, Norway and Spain, towards establishing the International Panel on Inequality, for which endorsement by the UN General Assembly is being sought this year.

In addition, the AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government has adopted a Decision profiling the key deliverables of the Johannesburg Summit, including the establishment of a G20 Continental Coordination Mechanism to strengthen coherence among AU, UN and G20 processes.

Through BRICS, South Africa will continue to advance reform of global governance institutions and support the development of the new BRICS Economic Partnership Strategy. The expansion of BRICS to eleven members marks a significant milestone in the growing voice of the Global South in international affairs.

It must also defend the rules that protect all nations, large and small.

We've formed the Hague Group to defend the credibility of international law, hold states accountable for breaches and protect the integrity of the international legal order. It was established to rally against complicity, end impunity and support the collective enforcement of international law through concrete measures, including halting arms transfers, blocking weapons shipments, suspending procurement from Israeli firms, ceasing energy exports and pursuing accountability through national and international courts.

As a country that voluntarily dismantled its nuclear weapons programme, we continue to advocate for the total elimination of nuclear weapons and will preside over the first Review Conference of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons later this year.

Our third task is to use foreign policy as a lever to improve conditions at home.

Honourable Members,

Foreign policy must ultimately speak to the lives of our people.

Our foreign policy must support inclusive economic growth, poverty eradication, sustainable development, peace and security.

Our economic diplomacy is yielding results; 45% our processed goods are traded on the continent including in agriculture. In 2025, South Africa's agricultural exports reached a record 15.1 billion US Dollars. In the first quarter of 2026, farm exports reached 3.7 billion US Dollars, an increase of 11% year on year.

These exports reach markets across Africa, the European Union and Asia. They show how foreign policy can support jobs, production and economic opportunity at home.

On migration, this means managing migration lawfully, in a coordinated manner and based on evidence. That law enforcement authorities enforce the law with regards to irregular migration not private citizens. It means the protection of the fundamental rights of every person, secure borders and an immigration system that is insulated from corruption.

Let me conclude by returning once more to President Mandela, who reminded us that because our nation arrived so late at the festival of liberty, it must “value freedom like the apple of its eye”.

This budget enables South Africa to discharge its responsibilities and obligations on the continent and beyond.

Let me take this opportunity to the Director General and all the staff of the department for their continued support on our work.

ISSUED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND COOPERATION

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