

Speech Minister of State Katja Keul at the German Ambassador's Residence in South Africa

(02.10.2024)

Ambassador Peschke,

Excellencies,

Distinguished guests,

Thank you, Ambassador Peschke, for the warm welcome and for hosting this reception on the eve of Germany's National Day.

It's a pleasure for me to speak to you all on this occasion.

The first time I came to South Africa in December 2022 it was for the 4th German-African Business Summit in Johannesburg, which was attended by more than 700 German companies.

I learned that some 100,000 people in South Africa work for 600 German companies.

South Africa is Germany's most important trading partner and the most important destination for foreign direct investment in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Tens of thousands of German tourists travel here each year and there is a frequent exchange of academics and researchers.

This is just a reflection of the quality of our bilateral economic relations.

We also have a common understanding that we can only face global challenges such as climate change by working together closely.

The Just Energy Transition Partnership, which aims to accelerate the phase-out of fossil fuels, is a flagship of our cooperation.

I was impressed by the round table we had here in 2022 and last year, I hosted a lunch with South African partners at the Federal Foreign Office in Berlin.

Together with representatives from Parliament, different provinces and the energy sector, we discussed the ongoing efforts in our countries to secure green energy and green jobs.

This visit is only one example of our active diplomatic relations with representatives from Government and Parliament travelling frequently between our two countries.

These bilateral relations are also strong at the regional and local level, for example with my German home region Lower Saxony.

On Monday, I visited the Eastern Cape province and met the Representative of Lower Saxony to the Eastern Cape, Ms Inger Steffen.

Together, we visited the local municipality of Amahlathi whose mayor had just returned from Germany where her delegation met with their sister town of Lamspringe.

There, I was also welcomed at the Lutheran Church which had been a German church for the settlers for a long time and where my great-grandfather was the reverend for 14 years at the beginning of the 20th century.

During my visit to the East London Museum, I learned more about the history of German missionaries and settlers in South Africa and Eastern Cape Province since the early 18th century.

The historical connections between South Africa and Germany are much closer than many people think.

The various German Christian missions, from the Cape up to Kwa Zulu-Natal province, have left tangible traces: not only churches, but also schools, libraries, and even breweries.

Missionaries provided access to health facilities and basic education. But many of them shared western arrogance and espoused racist ideas, working hand in hand with the colonisers.

Some also occupied land, and the question of land access remains an important issue to this day.

Therefore, we are currently preparing an exhibition together with our South African partners to address these important questions and to make these archives accessible to everyone.

Just some weeks ago I visited the Mission in Berlin for the first time when they reopened their new exhibition that they reworked together with their South African partner churches. Now it also reflects the harm that has been inflicted in the past.

The cross-border cooperation of museum experts and historians is crucial.

Because only if you know your past will you be able to understand the present and build a better future.

Ladies and gentlemen,

South Africa is one of Germany's most important democratic partners in Africa.

There are many issues that our countries are working on multilaterally, such as climate and global governance reform.

Germany is very much looking forward to working closely with South Africa during its upcoming G20 Presidency.

I firmly believe that Europe and Africa have common interests and must face current global challenges together.

Especially when it comes to peace and security!

No matter whether we look at Sudan, Gaza, Lebanon or Ukraine.

The suffering of the Sudanese people is on our mind even though it does not get the public attention it should.

We are all shocked by the terrible escalation in the Middle East these days.

There is no alternative to a two-state-solution so that Israelis and Palestinians can finally live in peace someday.

Russia's attack on its neighbouring country is a war of aggression that violates international law.

If we have any different views about this, it is even more important to continue our dialogue.

Together, we have a common understanding that borders have to be respected and that no one is allowed to invade and annex a neighbour country.

As German Government we are convinced that we cannot accept such a blatant breach of international law – not in Europe, not in Africa or anywhere else in the world.

That is the reason why we put so much emphasis on the reform of the Rome Statute, so that in the future the crime of aggression will fall under the jurisdiction of the ICC once and for all.

I want to be clear: Even though war has returned to Europe, we will not turn our backs on our African partners.

We want to foster our relations with Africa and deepen our partnership through mutual respect, reciprocity and open, continued dialogue.

We very much welcomed the African Union's membership in the G20 and strongly back a reform of the UN Security Council, together with South Africa and others.

The UN Pact for the Future, coordinated by Namibia and Germany and adopted in New York last week, is an important building block in that process.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Tomorrow, Germany will celebrate the Day of German Unity and 34 years of reunification.

For my generation, a divided Germany was a reality.

When the Berlin Wall came down 35 years ago, its tremendous positive impact was not only felt by millions in Germany, but also all over Europe and the world.

And it felt similar 30 years ago, when South Africa overcame Apartheid.

When it comes to supporting the fight against Apartheid it was Eastern Germany who – in that case – stood on the right side of history.

Germans having grown up in the western part - like me - often tend to forget about this.

During my official visits to African countries, I was surprised many times by the long lasting cultural and personal ties that still exist from the times of the German Democratic Republic.

In the end, justice prevailed and I can still remember the sound and images of the global “Free Mandela” campaign in the 80ies.

Vice-Chancellor Robert Habeck and I are the same age and we had a similar experience when we visited the Nelson Mandela exhibition at the Apartheid Museum two years ago:

It reminded us of something we had heard and seen as teenagers but somehow the details of it got lost over time.

Once back in Germany, I bought the “Long walk to freedom” and used the Christmas break to fill in the gaps.

South Africa overcame the long shadow of Apartheid and ushered in a new era of democracy.

As Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock put it during her visit to South Africa last year:

“South Africa’s path to freedom has been a beacon of hope, inspiring men and women around the world”.

The end of the Apartheid regime and the fall of the Berlin Wall show what countries and their people can achieve in their quest for democracy, freedom and peace.

We need these examples of positive change in a world of armed conflicts and human suffering.

And we need each other as democratic partners at a time in which democracy, the rule of law and human rights are under attack in many countries around the globe.

None of these issues can be solved by one country alone.

Therefore, we need to stand together and to continue to talk and listen to one another as partners and as friends.

And so I’m delighted to be here tonight and to celebrate the active friendship between our two countries with you.

With this in mind, I very much look forward to our conversations and I wish all of you a pleasant evening.

Thank you.