



## INCLUSIVE SOCIETY INSTITUTE

### Op-ed

#### **SOUTH AFRICA AND THE 12<sup>TH</sup> SUMMIT OF BRICS**

**by Daryl Swanepoel**

The 12<sup>th</sup> Summit of BRICS is scheduled to take place on 17 November 2012 via videoconference. The theme of the summit is “BRICS Partnership for Global Stability, Shared Security and Innovative Growth”. Russia, who currently holds the presidency, is the designated organiser of the event.

The main priorities to be discussed at the summit are:

- Strengthening multilateral principles in global politics and promoting the BRICS countries’ common interests at international platforms
- Developing cooperation in trade, the economy and finance
- Cooperation in the cultural and humanitarian spheres and strengthening of people-to-people contacts

#### **South Africa’s participation**

President Cyril Ramaphosa is scheduled to lead the South African delegation and will be accompanied by a number of cabinet ministers and government officials.

The objective of the President’s engagement in the BRICS Summit is to contribute to the future direction of BRICS, as well as to strengthen intra-BRICS relations and mutually beneficial cooperation across all pillars of cooperation. The National Development Plan (NDP) recommends that South Africa’s global foreign policy positioning should commence with establishing greater leverage in its multiple international affiliations, of which BRICS forms an important priority.

According to the Department of International Relations and Cooperation, specific objectives of the South Africa’s participation will include:

- The reaffirmation of South Africa’s support for multilateralism, and the respect for international law in the international system.
- South Africa is of the view that the global political, economic, and financial architecture is in need of restructuring in order for it to be more equitable and balanced.
- It will promote the strengthening of Africa’s strategic positioning within BRICS, aiming to solicit the blocs support for the continent’s development, infrastructure and industrialisation plans, such as the African Union’s Programme Infrastructure Development for Africa (PIDA) masterplan.

Moreover, from a South African perspective the delegation is expected to support the adoption of the BRICS Strategy for Economic Partnership 2025, thereby hoping to leverage the partnership towards addressing the triple challenges of poverty, inequality and unemployment through increased trade, investment, tourism, capacity building, skills, and technology transfers. The partnership seems to be working well given the tangible benefits the country has gained through cooperation in science,

technology, innovation, health and education. It has also benefitted from BRICS financing for infrastructure development, capacity building, research, educational and skilling opportunities. South Africa has, for example, benefitted greatly from the contribution of the New Development Bank, which aims to address the health and economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. In June 2020, for example, the Board of Directors of the New Development Bank (NDB) approved a COVID-19 Emergency Program Loan of USD 1 billion to South Africa.

Undoubtedly, the COVID-19 pandemic will also be on the summit's agenda. South Africa will use its position as current Chair of the African Union to engage its partners on the continent's response thereto, which is based on, amongst others, the:

- development of a joint continental strategy to combat the virus, which has been led, in collaboration with the World Health Organisation (WHO), by the Africa Centre for Disease Control and Prevention. It has played a vital role in advising African countries on various disease control measures and protocols.
- raising of resources through the African Union's COVID-19 Response Fund.
- setting up of a continental platform and centralised provision of technical support for acquiring and distributing diagnostic and therapeutic supplies to countries in need. This it has done through, inter alia, the Africa Medical Supplies Platform.
- Appointment of special envoys to engage the international community in order to mobilise the financial resources needed to respond to the pandemic and to recover from the economic damage caused by it.

In this regard, there has been substantial bilateral cooperation and support given by BRICS member states to South Africa in particular, and the African continent in general. It is safe to presume that the South African delegation will use the summit to build on the BRICS Health Ministers' agreement to continue providing mutual support for actions aimed at preventing and treating COVID-19. The ministers wish to create favourable conditions for the supply and delivery of quality and affordable medications, diagnostic materials, immunobiological preparations and medical equipment needed to suppress the pandemic. They also aim to enhance, within the BRICS countries, research and the development of innovative approaches, within mutually recognised systems, quality standards and vaccine verification processes.

In line with World Health Organisation efforts, who together with many governments, non-profit organisations and industry leaders aim to speed up the development and production of Covid-19 related vaccines and therapeutics, and to ensure that they are affordable, and efficiently and equitably distributed across the globe, these vaccines should, in South Africa's view, be designated as global public goods. To this end, South Africa is participating in several research initiatives with continental and international partners to develop, manufacture and distribute a COVID-19 vaccine. It believes that there is ample justification for the accelerated establishment of the BRICS Vaccine Research and Development Centre, which was as agreed to in the 2018 Johannesburg Declaration.

BRICS was established as a forum of like-minded, progressive emerging market and developing countries committed to the restructuring of the global political, economic and financial architecture. As already alluded to, they are of the opinion that such architecture needs to be more equitable, balanced and rooted in multilateralism and respect for international law. To this end, the member countries are committed to global governance reform aimed at giving effect thereto. They reject insular unilateralism, protectionism, violation of international law and illegitimate regime change. South Africa, it seems, stands ready, not only to maintain, but indeed strengthen its participation in BRICS, from within the official government-to-government channels and associated structures, such as the BRICS Business Council, BRICS Women's Business Alliance, the New Development Bank and the Interbank Cooperation Mechanism, the BRICS Think Tank Council, Academic and Civil forums.

*Daryl Swanepoel is the Chief Executive Officer of the Inclusive Society Institute. This opinion piece is written on the eve of the 12<sup>th</sup> Summit of BRICS, scheduled for 1t November 2020.*