

SA has grown its international presence says Zuma

South Africa has reinforced its relations with many of the countries of the world in the past two decades, President Jacob Zuma said on Wednesday (16 October).



President Jacob Zuma (Image: GCIS)

He welcomed new ambassadors and high commissioners accredited to South Africa during a ceremony at the Presidential Guest House in Pretoria. The heads of mission have been sent to Pretoria to strengthen ties between South Africa and their respective countries.

Pretoria has the second largest number of foreign missions in the world, second only to Washington. This can be attributed to the fact that South Africa's foreign policy has shifted since 1994, with the country moving from being isolated, to becoming an active member in the United Nations, the African Union and the Commonwealth of Nations.

South Africa was elected in 2006 and again in 2010 by the UN General Assembly to serve on the UN Security Council, which it did until December last year.

On Wednesday, heads of mission from 13 countries presented their credentials to Zuma. They represent Cape Verde, Uruguay, Israel, Venezuela, Austria, Algeria, Vietnam, Uganda, United Kingdom, United States, Senegal, Greece and Mongolia.

"We are humbled that your respective countries have chosen South Africa for accreditation," said Zuma. South Africa enjoys relatively strong trade relationships with most of these countries.

Strong bi-lateral trade

In 2008, the total bilateral trade between South Africa and the US was R123.7bn and last year, it was R122.7bn, according to the Department of Trade and Industry. The United States is also SA's second largest export destination and the third largest import partner.

Bilateral trade has recovered and is at 1.6% above the 2008 economic recession levels. Top South African companies such as Sasol, Dimension Data and Sappi have invested and created jobs in the United States. Similarly, 600 US companies have invested and created jobs in South Africa.

Two-way trade between South Africa and Senegal stood at less than R850m, with South Africa exporting just over R830m in goods to Senegal, while the Senegalese exports to South Africa totalled just R12m. Zuma believes there is room for improvement in trade relations with that country.

He said there was a growing tide of co-operation between South Africa and the United Kingdom, especially in trade and investment, tourism, culture, education and contact. In this regard, the two countries recommitted themselves to strengthening bilateral co-operation to increase the value of trade, which is currently worth R60bn.

Zuma told the heads of missions that energy remains crucial to South Africa's ability to attract foreign direct investment, pointing out that by 2030, South Africa planned to produce twice the amount of energy it was currently producing.

Three new power stations will be running in the next few years among the Medupi and Kusile coal fired stations. The country was also investing strongly in green energy, with two major solar power stations being built in the Northern Cape.

With regard to water, Zuma said every household needed to have clean running water by 2030, as envisaged in the National Development Plan (NDP).

"We are doing a lot to achieve this goal already. We have built two massive new dams in the last five years and are working on two more," he said. The two new dams are in Limpopo and Pietermaritzburg and will be officially unveiled next month.

Zuma added that the government had brought electricity to 6.9m new homes since 1994, equivalent to more than 1,300 new connections every day.

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