



**STATEMENT OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE BOARD OF THE
SOUTH CENTRE,
H.E. MR. THABO MBEKI
TWENTY-FIRST MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF
REPRESENTATIVES OF THE MEMBER STATES OF THE
SOUTH CENTRE
11 FEBRUARY 2021**

Mr. Convenor and Vice Convenor,
Your Excellencies, Representatives of the South Centre
Member States,
Members of the Board of the South Centre,
Executive Director and Members of the Secretariat:

The unprecedented health, economic and social crisis that the world has faced since last year has severely hit our developing countries and undermined their efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. In some cases, the progress made over the last decade, particularly in reducing poverty, has been lost. The effects of this crisis have not been felt equally among all countries either. It has exacerbated the profound

economic and social inequalities affecting the poorer countries and the most vulnerable.

Developing countries in the South not only had to deal with the problems of the past but also had to face the major challenges created by the pandemic especially how to protect the health and lives of the population while preserving the economy. Governments needed to adapt and innovate rapidly in a context of economic recession and a severe deterioration of living standards.

The South Centre has also adapted to this new and challenging context. It continued to undertake policy-oriented research and to provide support for negotiations as well as technical assistance in the areas defined in its regular Work Programme. Specifically on the COVID-19 response, the Centre has also assisted its Members and other developing countries in addressing the urgent issues relating to access to treatments and vaccines for COVID-19; alerted them to intensifying trends towards vaccine nationalism; informed them about the policy space available under international law to overcome barriers to access health technologies; promoted policies to increase domestic revenues; opposed illegitimate unilateral coercive measures; and supported initiatives to expand

the room for manoeuvre to expand the manufacturing capacity in developing countries of vaccines and other products needed to address the pandemic.

As is reflected in detail in the activity reports circulated by the Secretariat, the relocation to a new office and use of flexible working methods, distance learning and technical assistance, and an expanded cooperation with institutions and scholars from and of the South, allowed the Centre to increase its research outputs significantly as well as perform training and other activities even under challenging circumstances. In particular the Centre produced a significant number of research papers, policy briefs, SouthViews and SouthNews articles, and organized a number of briefings, trainings and webinars on the COVID-19 crisis.

The South Centre celebrated its 25th anniversary last year in 2020. I would like to thank all the Ambassadors of the Member States who sent messages of support and encouragement on the occasion of this celebration. The Centre is itself a manifestation of South-South cooperation and, while recognizing the diversity in development strategies, will continue to support developing countries in the search for common ground to strengthen their capacity

to build up a multilateral system that supports the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

This is our mission and, despite all the difficulties generated by the pandemic, we shall continue to make all efforts to perform the mandate given by President Nyerere and the other founders of the Centre. For this we need your continued financial support and the cooperation of your governments, peoples, intellectuals and civil society organizations.

The current crisis has confirmed and underlined the imperative to address the systemic injustices of our times through a strengthened, fair and inclusive multilateral system. International cooperation and solidarity cannot just be proclaimed. It must be practiced. The South Centre shall continue to play its role as an institution of the South fully committed to support the development efforts of its Members and other developing countries.

Thank you for your attention.