

REMARKS BY SOUTH AFRICA MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND INNOVATION, DR BLADE NZIMANDE, ON THE OCCASION OF THE LAUNCH OF THE BRICS VACCINE R&D CENTRE INITIATIVE

22 March 2022

Minister Wang Zhigang, Minister of Science and Technology of the People's Republic of China;

Minister Marcelo Queiroga, Minister of Health of the Federative Republic of Brazil

Minister Mikhail Murashko, Minister of Health of the Russian Federation

Minister Mansukh Mandaviya, Minister of Health & Family Welfare and Chemical and Fertilizers of the Republic of India

Ladies and gentlemen,

It am delighted and it is indeed a great honour and privilege for me to participate in today's historic event.

The launch of the BRICS Vaccine R&D Centre initiative is an important milestone, and for three strategic reasons. This initiate will significantly bolster global capacities to prepare for and respond to pandemics; it is an example of best practice in international cooperation in science; and it will further deepen BRICS partnership, solidarity and friendship.

South Africa first proposed the creation of a BRICS vaccine R&D centre during our Chairship in 2018. We are grateful for the subsequent support and efforts of the Brazilian, Russian and India Chairs, which ensured progress in taking forward this commitment, which our Heads of State had made in the Johannesburg Declaration at the 2018 BRICS Summit.

I would also like to pay tribute to and express our appreciation to Minister WANG and the People's Republic of China for the decisive leadership during China's Chairship, which resulted in our readiness to celebrate the launch of the initiative today.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the unfair and inequitable access to vaccination developing countries, especially in Africa, had to confront, and are still confronting, in attempting to safeguard our populations. The BRICS Vaccine R&D Centre initiative, underpinned by our shared values of commitments to multilateralism, solidarity and equality, will be a significant contribution to ensure vaccines as a global public good will become accessible and affordable to all who need them.

South Africa also fully supports for the initiative to have a broader focus, which will also include the development of new diagnostics and therapeutics, aligned with the One Health approach of the World Health Organisation.

Cooperation in epidemiological surveillance should be another priority for our partnership. South Africa stands ready to commit for this objective, resources such as our Network for Genomic Surveillance in South Africa, which continues to make valued global contributions to enhancing our understanding of the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

The BRICS Vaccine R&D Centre should also leverage the potential of disruptive new technologies and their applications, including Artificial Intelligence and big data, to develop the capacities of our science systems to prevent and fight pandemics. We are excited at the potential in this regard.

Dear colleagues, I said earlier that the BRICS collaboration in science, including the launch of this initiative, but also the ongoing work supported through the BRICS Framework Programme, constitutes an example of best practice in international scientific cooperation. This is because our partnership involves a strong commitment to joint ownership and shared responsibility, the real and open sharing of experience, expertise and resources; and a determination to contribute our respective, comparative scientific and technological strengths for the advancement of the global good.

Dear BRICS partners, you can count on South Africa's determined effort and contributions to ensure the success of this initiative.

For this purpose, we pledge the resources of our public research and technology organisations, led by our Medical Research Council and also the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research.

Furthermore, we will also make available the expertise in our renowned centers of excellence in infectious disease, in our institutions of higher education, and leverage the capacities of our growing pharmaceutical industry, to develop and expand the BRICS Vaccine R&D Centre initiative.

During our Chairship in 2023, building on the outstanding effort of Minister WANG and the Chinese Government, the progress of this initiative, will be a priority for the South African Government.

I thank you.