



**ADDRESS BY MINISTER OF HEALTH, DR JOE PHAAHLA, AT THE  
13<sup>th</sup> BRICS HEALTH MINISTERS MEETING RECEPTION DINNER**

**CHIEF ALBERT LUTHULI INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION CENTRE**

**03 AUGUST 2023**

Programme Director;

Premier of KwaZulu-Natal, Hon Ms Nomusa Dube;

Deputy Minister of Health, Hon Dr S bongiseni Dhlomo, Minister of Health of  
the Federative Republic of Brazil; Hon. Nisia Trindade Lima

Vice-Minister of the National Health Commission of the People's Republic of  
China; Hon. Lei Haichao,

Minister of Health & Family Welfare of the Republic of India, Hon. Mansukh  
Mandaviya,

Deputy Minister of Health Care of the Russian Federation, Hon. Sergey  
Glagolev,

MEC for Health, KwaZulu-Natal Province, Hon. Ms Nomagugu Simelane;

Your Excellencies;

WHO Country Representative, Dr Owen Kaluwa

Distinguished delegates;

Ladies and gentlemen;

It is indeed a great honour for me to welcome you to South Africa on the occasion of the 13<sup>th</sup> BRICS Health Ministers meeting in Durban, the largest city of KwaZulu-Natal province and chief seaport of South Africa.

Our meeting is aptly convened under the theme: “Bridging the Gap on Sustainable Health on the road to UHC 2023” which is more relevant today as the global community emerge from the devastating effect of the COVID-19 pandemic and as equally as we are grappling with the concept of sustainable health for all – leaving no one behind. South Africa is honoured to host this first face-to-face meeting of BRICS Ministers of Health. We reaffirm our commitment to build on the successes of the previous twelve sessions of this partnership with added and forward-looking health agenda for the betterment of our peoples.

The influence of BRICS countries in the international arena has risen enormously and certainly cannot be ignored in the Global Health agenda. Some of the key themes that have emerged repeatedly in BRICS Health Ministers’ Declarations over the last 12 years include:

- Affirmations of political will to achieve Universal Health Coverage (UHC).
- Highlighting the interdependence between public health and socio-economic development.

- Reiterating the impact of foreign policy on health outcomes.
- Reiterating our commitment to use TRIPS flexibilities to promote access to medicines, and share experiences with other developing countries.
- Reiterating our support for the International Health Regulations (IHR) (2005) as well as Pandemic Preparedness and Response.

The health sector under BRICS has registered satisfactory progress in terms of cooperation partnerships at both public and private sector levels. To this end, we worked together progressively in addressing the scourge of COVID-19. we also exchanged country-level information on the the spread of COVID-19 and best practices in fighting it. We also collected and exchanged data, as well as analyse statistical information to find the best ways to stop diseases. All of this work was not in vain considering that we have made great progress to arrest and to limit the rampant spread of the disease with its devastating impact. We further agreed on the need for Establishment of an Integrated Early Warning System for preventing of mass infectious disease risks, in accordance with International Health Regulations. What progress made Madam?? Add a liner here?

In line with our commitment and the political will of ensuring public health quality and access, we continuously affirmed the importance of ensuring the right to universal and equal access to health technologies through sharing of knowledge, intellectual property and data necessary for COVID-19 detection, prevention, treatment and response. Our senior officials have deliberated on this crucial aspect of our partnership which we will reflected upon in our meeting. To boost a bit, if I am allowed, ladies and gentlemen – South Africa has made progressive strides in this regard through the introduction of the

UHC bill. We are very much feeling elated with this progress to cover every citizen of our country.

As South Africa, we fully support the initiative by the WHO together with many governments, non-profit organisations and industry leaders to speed up the development and production of vaccines and therapeutics, and to ensure that they are distributed quickly, equitably and affordably across the globe. We are mindful and informed that we emerged from a dreaded experience of vaccine hoarding making it essential to develop a capacity of our own in addressing this challenge. We are grateful for the mRNA technology transfer hub located at Afrigen, in Cape Town. This is meant to build capacity in low- and middle-income countries to produce mRNA vaccines through a centre of excellence and training.

The 13<sup>th</sup> BRICS Health Ministers Meeting takes place at a crucial time for BRICS as we expect the expansion agenda of BRICS to be discussed extensively by BRICS leaders during the 15<sup>th</sup> BRICS Summit scheduled to take place from 22-24 August 2023 in Johannesburg. As the first beneficiary of BRICS expansion, South Africa also recognises that new members can contribute positively to the and bring to bear needed resources and knowledge production to catapult our partnership to greater heights to the benefit of our peoples

South Africa cannot prosper in isolation leaving the entire African continent behind especially the SADC region. This is also the premise of our country's foreign policy in relation to the consolidation of the African agenda. This is clearly reflected in the theme for the 15<sup>th</sup> BRICS Summit which is "BRICS

and Africa: Partnership for Mutually Accelerated Growth, Sustainable Development and Inclusive Multilateralism”.

Our partnership has put forward nine (9) thematic areas to be discussed during this year’s meeting of Ministers of Health. These issues include UHC, Digital Health, Early Warning System for Predicting Pandemics, Traditional Medicine, TB Research Network, Medicines Regulatory Authorities, Emergency Operations Centres, the network of “brains” for scientists in virology, immunology, epidemiology”, Nuclear Medicine to Prevent/reduce the risks of death from oncology diseases and launching a BRICS Health Journal.

The daunting task before us as BRICS Ministers of Health is how do we engineer post covid recovery in our countries and leapfrog to universal health coverage of our citizens and economic recovery. How do we deal with shared public health challenges, including inequitable access to health services and medicines, growing health costs, infectious diseases like TB and HIV, and also growing rates of non-communicable diseases.

I do hope and I am certain that we can form and develop a united front as we participate in the upcoming United Nations General Assembly and take advantage of our shared common vision and commitment towards the agenda on Pandemic Preparedness, Tuberculosis and Universal Health Coverage.

As I close my remarks, Ladies and Gentlemen, I trust you will enjoy your stay in KwaZulu-Natal Province and make time to see a bit of the beauty of Durban and its surroundings and equally enjoy the beauty of the seafront

promenade running from uShaka Marine World, a huge theme park with an aquarium, to the futuristic Moses Mabhida Stadium and off course, the people of this region in a spirit of Ubuntu – meaning “ I am because you are” simple put - humanity towards others.

Allow me to propose a toast,

To the prosperity of our BRICS partnership,

To the good health, happiness, continued friendship of countries and

To the health of all guests present here!

Cheers

I thank you all and enjoy your evening