STATEMENT BY HON. NETUMBO NANDI-NDAITWAH, DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND COOPERATION AND CHAIR OF THE SADC COUNCIL OF MINISTERS, ON THE OCCASION OF THE SADC SOLIDARITY CONFERENCE WITH WESTERN SAHARA

25 MARCH 2019
PRETORIA, SOUTH AFRICA
Your Excellency Olusegun Obasanjo, Former President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria
Honourable Lindiwe Sisulu, Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of South Africa
Honourable Ministers
Distinguished Secretaries General or Chairpersons and Members of the Political Parties
Distinguished Representatives of Former National Liberation Movements
Your Excellencies Members of the Diplomatic Corps
Distinguished Invited Guests
Members of the Media
Ladies and Gentlemen

Let me on your behalf express our deepest thanks and appreciation to our host South Africa and to the Minister of International Relations and Cooperation for the warm welcome extended to all of us. Let me also thank the Government and people of South Africa for the generous hospitality accorded to us since our arrival.
We also thank the Minister of International Relations and Cooperation for having availed this magnificent facility for us to hold our Conference.

Let me also on behalf of the SADC member states thank you Honourable Ministers, invited guests and other delegates from all over the world, for having taken the time to express solidarity with POLISARIO and the people of Western Sahara. As an individual who is a product of our national liberation struggle, I can say with confidence that it is such solidarity that sustained us during our struggle. This Conference might be a small measure in the scheme of things. However, it is a necessary contribution in the process of consolidating peace on the African continent and by extension the world at large. It is therefore particularly gratifying to have in our midst the former Head of State of Nigeria, His Excellency Olusegun Obasanjo, who will assist with our proceedings.

I am pleased by the opportunity to open the discussion today and I am delighted by the attendance, which is testimony to our unity on a common cause - the call for the right to
freedom and self-determination of the people of Western Sahara, as per the various resolutions of the OAU- AU and the United Nations.

Today, colonialism and apartheid have been obliterated from the Southern African region, thanks to international solidarity and support. When we were fighting for the liberation of our respective countries, the international community extended their support to us. It was the sacrifices of the oppressed people in Southern Africa complemented by the support and solidarity that brought about the implementation of numerous resolutions of the United Nations and the then OAU. This implementation then resulted in our freedom and independence.

Therefore, our task here today is to call for the end of Morocco’s illegal occupation of Western Sahara through the implementation of the UN Settlement Plan. To that end, it is expected of us to make a difference in the political process of Western Sahara. I wish to call upon you to support the plight of the Saharawi people just as we were supported during the dark days of our liberation struggle. Now, it is
indeed our turn to also provide much needed assistance to our brothers and sisters of Western Sahara, in their struggle for their inalienable right to self-determination and freedom.

Before I conclude, let me once again reiterate how pleased I am to have His Excellency President Obasanjo and Honourable Simbarashe Mumbengegwi, former Foreign Minister of Zimbabwe and Secretary for External Relations of ZANU-PF, who will lead the discussions on two very important topics on Western Sahara, during the working groups.

We look forward to their guidance during this conference. Equally, I look forward to further engagements from the Honourable Ministers, Political Parties, the Youth, NGOs, Media and all invited guests.

I now take this opportunity to declare the Working Groups Meeting officially open.

I thank you