

Opening Statement for the Plenary By Vitalice Meja – Reality of Aid Africa on Behalf of CSOs delivered at the Second High-level United Nations Conference on South- South Cooperation (BAPA+40 Conference)

Your Excellency President of the Republic of Argentina President Mauricio Macri

Your Excellency Secretary General of the United Nations; Mr. Antonio Guterres

Administrator UNDP Mr. Achim Steiner

Honorable Minister, Distinguished Delegates, Colleagues and Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen

I have the pleasure to be among you today and give opening Statement to the meeting of the Second High-level United Nations Conference on South- South Cooperation (BAPA+40 Conference).

Ladies and Gentlemen, We are at crossroads. It has been more than 40 years since this agenda was brought forth. Let us celebrate this milestone. South-South Co-operation and triangular Co-operation is growing. We must also be prepared to look each other in the eye ask ourselves tough questions...what have we achieved and for who. In doing so we must go back to the basics, to the aspirations and the foundations of South-South Co-operation.

South-South Co-operation is a manifestation of solidarity among peoples and countries of the South that contributes to their national well-being, national and collective self-reliance and the attainment of development goals. It is a common endeavor of peoples and countries of the South, born out of shared experiences and sympathies, based on their common objectives and solidarity towards national development, self-reliance and independence colonialism.

It is put forward as a demonstration of solidarity between equals and a desire for mutual development. The partnerships of countries engaged in South-South development cooperation are said to be characterized as horizontal as it deviates away from the traditional donor-recipient relationship. These assumptions would imply that the Southern countries involved are not in unbalanced relations of

power but rather are negotiating as equals that mutually seek to engage in development cooperation. We must never lose these aspirations. We must never lose this focus.

South-South Co-operation remains complimentary and not a substitute to North – South Co-operation. We call on SSC actors to serve as an example to, or even challenge N-S Cooperation by upholding its core principles while urging the North: to deliver on their ODA obligations, fulfil their development effectiveness commitments, stop the instrumentalization of aid for security and commercial interests;

Today, the world faces extreme economic, gender and political inequalities that require urgent and concrete policies and initiatives to be effectively reduced. South-South and Triangular Cooperation are very well positioned to contribute to reduce inequalities all over the world. SSC should continue to be an instrument not just for implementing SDG agenda but more so for realizing its aspirations of national and collective genuine sustainable development, self-reliance and independence. It should continue to be an expression of solidarity of the Global South. It should continue to enable developing countries to play a more active role in international policy and decision-making processes, in support of their efforts to achieve sustainable development at the national and community level.

We also call on SSC to play a key role in strengthening domestic resource mobilization at the national level without taking away development resources from and imposing new tax burdens on the poor. SSTC should promote reforms to foster **universal social protection** coverage, build **progressive fiscal systems** and ensure **living wages** for all, as key tools for equality. It should prioritize financing for gender equality and women’s rights including financing Women’s Rights Organisations especially from the Global South.

In strengthening and further invigorating the framework for South-South and triangular cooperation, we must seek to answer the questions “for what and for whom?” Answering this will make it easier for all to see if our actions are indeed relevant and serve the overall goal and needs of the South. The answer: the

people. SSTC should be for achieving human development and equality within and between countries and between men and women, together with a reaffirmation of the commitments to the 2030 Agenda. It must help the citizens of the South Claim their rights.

At the heart of South-South and Triangular Co-operation must be the citizen of the South. When talking about inclusiveness and multi-stakeholder partnerships, we must first and foremost endeavour to create institutional frameworks, spaces, and resources to ensure people's ownership of our aspirations, initiatives and results. Citizens of the South must cease to be seen as mere beneficiaries but as rights holders and key actors of development. We should be included as key decision-makers, planners, implementers, monitors and evaluators of SSTC policies, programs and projects at all levels – from community to national to international. We urge you to begin this by acknowledging the fact and respecting CSOs as independent development actors not just in words but in deeds –by providing us with an enabling environment to play our rightful role - from access to timely and quality information, official engagement spaces, financial resources. Above all, we call for the reversal of the global trend of closing civic space and an putting an end to repression of CSOs and the people at large in the course of implementing SSTC. For repression reinforces conflicts, and conflicts hinder solidarity and development, the spirit of SSTC.

SSTC to be effective in contributing to development should promote peace – one that is based on justice and addresses the root causes of conflicts by desisting from land grabbing, pursuance of extractive industries or control of geo-strategic locations. While one of the principles of SSC is non-interference on domestic affairs, we urge that there be mechanisms to ensure that SSC actors encourage one another to protect people's rights.

To realize these, it is important that future investments pursue the development agenda that put peoples' rights first and ensure decent work based on employment opportunities, respect for labor rights, social protection, and social dialogue. We urge that SSC adheres to the principles of transparency and accountability, inclusivity and development results.

In engaging the private sector, we urge against letting the corporations and IFIs dictate SSTC's development agenda given their devastating impacts that we and the future generations have to endure on a daily basis. Their role in SSTC should be decreased if not immediately ceased. They should be held accountable and required to comply with international labour standards, responsible business conduct based on due diligence, and fiscal and environmental liability.

On the other hand, **we recognise** the important role of the Southern domestic private sector, particularly micro, small and medium enterprises - and call for their support so that they may contribute to sustainable national industrialization, support the modernization of sustainable agriculture, and achieve people-centered development and national self-reliance.

In involving private sector, it should be noted, however, that provision of essential services such as health, education, housing, water and clean energy should remain a core responsibility of the government. Also, there still needs to be caution in developing Public Private Partnership arrangements with them.

Instead of the corporations and the IFIs, we the people – our communities and civil society organizations, should be at the heart of South-South cooperation. We have the full grasp of the poverty that we are in, and thus are your best partners in making SSTC realize the not only the SDGs but the aspirations of South-South cooperation.

I thank you