

An African view

But where does South Africa fit in?

Kenya is a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council. As Russia invaded Ukraine in February, Kenya's UN ambassador made a remarkable contribution – from a clear African perspective. South Africa previously had similar chances – and blew it each time. In 2007, the General Assembly chose South Africa to serve a two-year term on the Security Council. During that time South Africa voted against a resolution condemning human rights abuses in Myanmar. It helped block a sanctions resolution against Zimbabwe's rulers for violating human rights, and it refused to support a resolution making rape a war crime.¹ In March 2022, now an ordinary member of the UN, South Africa abstained from a resolution deploring Russia's invasion. The UN resolution had further urged "the immediate peaceful resolution of the conflict between the Russian Federation and Ukraine through political dialogue, negotiations, mediation and other peaceful means." Kenya had already stepped forward. Its ambassador to the UN, Dr Martin Kimani, made the following statement – note, this was before Russia invaded Ukraine.

Ambassador Martin Kimani Statement to the UN 21 February 2022

'We meet tonight on the brink of a major conflict in Ukraine. The diplomacy we urged on the 17th of February is failing.

The territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine stands breached. The Charter of the United Nations continues to wilt under the relentless assault of the powerful.

In one moment it is invoked with reverence by the very same countries who then turn their backs on it in pursuit of objectives diametrically opposed to international peace and security.

In the two last meetings on the situation in Ukraine and the build-up of forces by the Russian Federation, Kenya urged that diplomacy be given a chance.

Our cry was not heeded, and more importantly, the Charter's demand for states to "settle their international disputes by peaceful means in such

a manner that international peace and security, and justice, are not endangered" has been profoundly undermined.

Today, the "threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of Ukraine" has been effected.

Kenya is gravely concerned by the announcement made by the Russian Federation to recognize Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine as independent states.

In our considered view, this action and announcement breaches the territorial integrity of Ukraine.

We do not deny that there may be serious security concerns in these regions. But they cannot justify today's recognition of Donetsk and Luhansk as independent states. Not when there were multiple diplomatic tracks available and underway that had the ability to offer peaceful solutions.

Mr President, Kenya, and almost every African country, was birthed by

the ending of the empire. Our borders were not of our own drawing. They were drawn in the distant colonial metropolises of London, Paris and Lisbon with no regard for the ancient nations that they cleaved apart.

Today, across the border of every single African country live our countrymen with whom we share deep historical, cultural and linguistic bonds.

At independence, had we chosen to pursue states on the basis of ethnic, racial or religious homogeneity, we would still be waging bloody wars these many decades later.

Instead, we agreed that we would settle for the borders that we inherited. But we would still pursue continental political, economic and legal integration. Rather than form nations that looked ever backward into history with a dangerous nostalgia, we chose to look forward to a greatness none of our many nations and peoples had ever known.

We chose to follow the rules of the OAU [Organisation of African Unity] and ►►



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the United Nations Charter not because our borders satisfied us but because we wanted something greater forged in peace.

We believe that all states formed from empires that have collapsed or retreated have many peoples in them yearning for integration with peoples in neighbouring states. This is normal and understandable. After all, who does not want to be joined to their brethren and to make common purpose with them?

However, Kenya rejects such a yearning from being pursued by force. We must complete our recovery from the embers of dead empires in a way that does not plunge us back into new forms of domination and oppression.

We rejected irredentism and expansionism on any basis, including racial, ethnic, religious or cultural factors. We reject it again today.

Kenya registers its strong concern and opposition to the recognition of Donetsk and Luhansk as independent states.

We further strongly condemn the trend -- in the last few decades -- of powerful states, including members of this Security Council, breaching international law with little regard.

Multilateralism lies on its deathbed tonight. It has been assaulted, as it has been by other powerful states in the recent past.

We call on all member states to stand behind the Secretary General in asking him to rally us to a standard defending multilateralism. We also call on him to bring his good offices to bear to help the concerned parties resolve the situation by peaceful means.

Let me conclude by reaffirming Kenya's respect for the territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders.

I thank you.'

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ENDNOTES

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