

South Africa – the country of no consistency

By **Darren Bergman MP** - DA Shadow Minister of International Relations and Cooperation

Diplomacy helps countries to build relationships that could assist in the advancement of technology; the stimulation of trade and to keep the peace.

Unfortunately South Africa dithers in clarity between its internal culture and its external policies. When it comes to being the champion of human rights it would be more credible and appreciated if South Africa was consistent. In Africa we fight for Western Sahara but remain silent on Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, Uganda and Cameroon. We fight for Palestine but remain silent on the treatment of the Rohingya and Uighurs. This could leave many people wondering what is it that is driving the foreign affairs of South Africa?

At one stage we could have said our relationship with BRICs but that seems to have simmered somewhat. It just goes to show that South Africa has been spending millions upon millions in membership to all these organisations and yet when it came to COVID et al it seemed we learnt who our real friends were. By now we should know that some of these organisations are just not worth belonging to and that our monies could be better spent domestically. We should also prioritise our delegations accordingly saving our best for the best.

With regards to DIRCO, we have a DG that has now apparently been suspended for the New York shannanigans but I remember a few weeks ago the minister going to great lengths to point out that she never said the DG was suspended for that reason and then threw her spokesperson under the bus for daring to allegedly say that it was the reason. The CFO who was there at the time has been suspended before but obviously when your subordinates are investigating you and having to find against you, you pretty safe and there are no surprises as to why the CFO is still there. DIRCO is now a Hollywood blockbuster with a whole lot of actors. An acting DG and acting CFO.

What we need are people that are going to act in the best interest of the public and start servicing the public at our missions abroad. We have the second biggest footprint but we are beholden to the service of home affairs. When they decide to process passports, IDs and other documents is a thumb suck guess on its own but when DIRCO finally get the diplomatic bags delivered is another mystery all on its own. In the end we have these lovely looking offices, with tired and battered looking officials that can only really offer our citizens excuses.

When will we have a joint committee meeting in the interest of our citizens abroad?

Some people will come here and talk about the punishment of closing embassies and will forget how sore they felt when they thought China had recalled their Ambassador. However the Democratic Alliance has been calling for the decreasing of our footprint and consulates in areas where it does not make any sense cost, technology or trade wise. It is sad that we had to hear that this is possibly happening through the media. It should be something that is fed through the oversight committee for comments and input before it becomes a decision.

Unfortunately with our current track record we are bound to close the embassies that are beneficial in trade and technology or those that are visa intensive causing more burden to the citizens of our countries in terms of job losses; lack of tourism and in trade.

You cannot expect much more from a country when around 75% of their heads of missions are political appointees; most of their officials in DIRCO are career diplomats and they head up a lot of the functions that require specialisations that could help South Africa protect itself from its own government.