

OFFICE OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE BOARD

**STATEMENT OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE SOUTH CENTRE
BOARD,**

THABO MBEKI:

COUNCIL OF MEMBER STATES, 24 FEBRUARY 2022

Mr. Convenor and Vice Convenor,

Your Excellencies, Representatives of the South Centre Member States,

Members of the Board of the South Centre,

Executive Director and Members of the Secretariat:

Once again the health, economic and social crisis caused by COVID-19 forces us to hold this meeting virtually. The deterioration of the situation in developing countries, to which I alluded two years ago, has only worsened. The gap between the countries of the North and the global South has widened. The lack of solidarity and selfishness of the countries of the North has led to the inequality in access to vaccines that we all know today.

If COVID-19 has taught us anything, it is that we must completely rethink the value we place on the health sector. The billions needed to prevent and respond to health crises are nothing compared to the billions lost in business closures, job losses and economic paralysis that are the cost to the global economy of a health emergency like the COVID-19 pandemic.

The South Centre, in this second year of the pandemic, has continued to adapt and innovate in its ways to support and accompany developing countries in this challenging context.

As clearly reflected in the activity reports prepared by the Secretariat, the Centre has continued and intensified the use of virtual working methods, as well as increased cooperation with Southern and Southern institutions and academics, as reflected in the publications produced by the Centre in 2021. In the last two years, the Centre produced a significant number of research papers, policy briefs, South Views articles and South News.

In 2021, the Centre continued to support developing countries in finding common ground to strengthen their capacity to build a multilateral system that supports the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Despite all the challenges that the pandemic continues to create over the past two years, we will continue to do our utmost to fulfil the mandate given to the founders of the Centre. I am grateful for the financial support and cooperation of your governments in keeping the Centre active at this critical time.

The global response to the COVID-19 pandemic has not achieved equal and equitable access. The world is divided between a limited number of countries where people can protect themselves and a majority of nations where people are exposed and vulnerable to the pandemic. The longer this inequality persists, the more prolonged the current and similar crises will be in the future.

The Centre will continue to closely follow the participation of Southern countries in the various global processes currently underway at the WHO, the WTO, WIPO and the Human Rights Council as well as the climate change negotiations.

The current crisis continues to underline the imperative of a strengthened, fair and inclusive multilateral system. International cooperation and solidarity cannot be limited to announcements of the moment. They must be practised. The South Centre will continue to play its role as an institution of the countries of the South fully committed to supporting poverty eradication efforts in developing countries.

Thank you for your attention.