



Chris L. Pepani

Capital: In your six-year stay as the Ambassador of the Republic of South Africa to Ethiopia, what would you say were your accomplishments?

Pepani: The first priority for an ambassador is to build robust relations; that's the fundamental requirement of the job. Therefore, my primary assignment was to do that between Ethiopia and the Republic of South Africa. I can safely say that, to a large extent, this has been achieved and our relations have reached a level that we hadn't achieved before. At the political level they have been enhanced and the cooperation between us is very good, while at the economic level it is a work in progress and we're striving for greater heights. There has been great enthusiasm on the part of South African companies to open up shop and do business in Ethiopia.

Capital: What is the significance of Dr. Nkosazana Clarice Dlamini-Zuma's appointment as the African Union Commission (AUC) Chairperson and its importance for the African continent?

Pepani: Well, Dr. Zuma is the first woman candidate to be at the helm of our premier and foremost organization, the AUC, which is a vehicle for the implementation of all the decisions of the General Assembly. Having said that, she's also the first candidate to be elected from the southern region, the continent being divided into five regions by the AUC; the north, south, east, west and central regions. I think for me this is very critical and very important, taking into account the caliber of the kind of person she is, and the background she comes from. She's no stranger to international affairs because she was the Foreign Minister of South Africa for the last ten years. She was at the Sirte Declaration of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in Libya when the decision was made to establish the African Union (AU), when the Pan African Parliament (PAP) was launched and when the peace and security protocol was set up in 2002. She was also in attendance when the New Economic Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) was initiated; therefore, her capability is unquestionable, backed up with a wealth of experience that she will bring to bear in serving the continent. Of course her commitment, drawn from the anti-apartheid liberation movement and the struggle for the emancipation of women plus her commitment to the development of women and the continent of Africa is absolute. Let's just say, she's got a fantastic track record.

Capital: How would you describe the current economic relationship between Ethiopia and South Africa?

Pepani: As I indicated early on, I'm sure there's room for improvement in terms of our economic relationship. To reiterate, expressions of interest have been evinced by South African businesses to invest in Ethiopia. Already, the Pretoria Cement Company (PCC) has found a local Ethiopian company to partner with, and they are doing quite well. Then there's Tiger Brands, they've started from the east African group based in Nairobi, and have found a partner here in Ethiopia. We have also different groups that are interested in the agricultural sector, specifically in coffee and in setting up abattoirs. Also MTN (Mobile Telephone Network), which is a global brand with a reach beyond the continent and a turnover of USD 15 billion per annum have obtained the license to operate here in April. They're also part of the official sponsors of the Ethiopian National football team, which will participate in the African Cup of Nations, on January 18.

So in a way, we are strengthening ties on the economic front and will continue to do so in the future. Along this line, in April 2012, a joint ministerial meeting was held between the two countries. At this meeting, the important issues that came up were to take stock of our relations. It's important and opportune that the current Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn, who was Foreign Minister at the time, and the South African Minister of the Department of International Relations and Cooperation, Maitre Nkoana Mashabane, co-chaired this meeting and decided that a new Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was unnecessary and that it was better to strengthen the implementation of current areas of cooperation, which had been decided upon previously. To do this, they had decided to set up teams from both sides which will be travelling between Addis Ababa and Pretoria to make this evaluation every six months, and so in November, a select Ethiopian delegation went to South Africa for this purpose.

Capital: What would you say are the figures for South African investments in Ethiopia, and the trade balance between the two countries?

Pepani: At the moment, I don't remember the figures, but I can certainly refer you to the trade official at the South African embassy who can elaborate on that, but I think it's growing at a brisk pace. If you go to most supermarkets here, you will find South African products on the shelves and stands, and beyond that we are looking into critical areas of significance. Both of these economies have substantial agricultural sectors and we are working with the government to address the issue of food security here. We're also moving into the field of mining and possibly the potential Ethiopia has in the areas of gas and energy. I'm glad to tell you that in November a business delegation from South Africa had come here, and met with officials of the Ethiopian Chamber of Commerce and Sectoral Association (ECCSA), and the ex- CEO of ECX, Eleni Gabre-Madhin. I understand that she will be visiting South Africa to pursue some of these discussions and take them to a higher level.

Capital: Ethiopia is currently embarking on large infrastructure projects across the country and it is looking for financing from multilateral institutions as well as bilaterally from alternative financial sources such as emerging economies. In this regard, what would you say could be the South African government's role? □□□

Pepani: We would be available for such ventures, if the opportunities avail themselves; certainly, South Africa has huge construction companies with excellent track records globally,

especially in places like Dubai and Qatar. If you remember the story of the Chilean miners two years ago, who were trapped underground for months and rescued, South African construction companies were part of a team of companies that accomplished that feat. Therefore, I reiterate, we would be available if and when opportunities present themselves. I can also say that there's certainly an interest by South African firms to participate in railway projects and there are contacts and discussions regarding this. (Capital)