

**SPEECH BY THE DEPUTY MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS AND INFRASTRUCTURE,
HON MS BERNICE SWARTS, ON THE OCCASION OF THE CELEBRATION OF
AUSTRIA'S NATIONAL DAY**

25 October 2023

Your Excellency, Ambassador Königsbrun

Dean of the Diplomatic Corps

Excellences, Ambassadors and High Commissioners

Members of the Diplomatic Community

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Thank you Ambassador Königsbrun for the introduction and your kind words.

On behalf of the Government and people of South Africa, I would like to congratulate the Government and the people of Austria, on this special occasion of celebrating their National Day.

Your Excellency,

South Africa's bilateral relations with Austria are sound and on an upward trajectory, with South Africa having successfully hosted the 3rd Meeting of the South Africa-Austria Bilateral Consultations in Pretoria on 7 June 2022, after a two-year hiatus, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Bilateral Consultations discussed issues of common interest ranging from bilateral, regional to global matters. These Consultations illustrate commitment to the development of our bilateral relations as well as addressing common challenges.

In achieving a radical socio-economic transition by 2030 through the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 Vision, we value the support of our international partners who support government's intention to gradually shift resources towards investment that grows the economy, broadens opportunities and enhances capabilities. South Africa is encouraged by bilateral trade and investments which is contributing towards skills development and job creation in the country.

Austria has become one of South Africa's most important economic partners in Europe. Almost a quarter of Austria's exports to Africa is destined for the South African market, with 30% of all imports from Africa to Austria originating from South Africa.

South Africa is enhancing its cooperation with Austria as a world leader in the areas of renewable energy, wastewater treatment, recycling, organic agriculture, innovation/digitalization, and environmental technologies.

Austria is also renowned for its vocational training and South Africa is keen to engage the Austrian government on the possibilities of establishing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Austria in the field of Vocational Training, and to unlock mutual opportunities for South Africa and Austria.

We appreciate Austria's contribution to South Africa's economic growth through Austrian companies that have invested in South Africa and that have made an invaluable contribution to job creation and skills and technology transfer in the country.

Your Excellency

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) aims to promote intra-African trade, but it will also affect Africa's external trade relations. South Africa commends Austria for the development and implementation of the new Austria Africa Strategy and the Africa Investment and Trade Strategy 2022-2026, which aim to build synergy within the broader framework of the AU-EU partnership towards engendering a greater sense of urgency to establish a strategic relationship with Africa.

The COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on tourism and it's comforting to note the numbers are increasing to the pre COVID period.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I believe it is fair to say that our two countries enjoy excellent relations, and as South Africa we are committed to elevate relations with Austria through the Bilateral Consultations mechanism and the prospect of the visit to South Africa in December 2023 of Mr Alexander Schallenberg, the Federal Minister for European and International Affairs of Austria.

In celebration of the National Day of Austria and in recognition of the continuation and expansion of our longstanding friendship, it is my honour to invite you all to join me in a toast

to the health of President Van Der Bellen and continued growth in the relationship between the peoples of South Africa and Austria.

Thank you