Dear President Matamela Cyril Ramaphosa

Re: South Africa to move its Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem.

There have been debates recently involving the downgrade of the South African Embassy in Israel with the intention to resort to a Liaison office. Such debates have been motivated and inspired by the false narrative that Israel is an Apartheid state. This fake rhetoric has been perpetuated too often and has done much damage instead of suggesting solutions for the real issues on the ground. Here Mister President I am going to guide you to the relevant path like a guiding star. A path that will put South Africa in a rightful place, and hence should be taken going forward.

As a point of departure, it is important to acknowledge that an embassy facilitates the means for peaceful cooperation and collaboration between a foreign country and its host country. An embassy is a diplomatic mission generally located in the capital city of another country which offers a full range of services, including consular services. South Africa is not an exception to diplomatic relationships. Article 4 of the Vienna Convention gives a guide on the matters concerning foreign diplomatic missions and consular posts. South Africa is a party to this treaty. It is common cause that South Africa has Embassies in capital cities in some areas with tussles. Just to mention a few, the country still has a functional embassy office in Libya; we furthermore have an honorary consulate in Aleppo, Syria and a consulate of South Africa in Sana’a,Yemen which is functional. We remain in such areas because, there is a solemn belief that we can contribute to solving issues in those countries. The same energy can be channeled to the Middle East conflict.

Mister President I understand that you have been under pressure to recall our ambassador from Israel with the intention to retain a liaison office in Tel Aviv, which will oversee South Africa’s continuing provision of consular services and any trade and economic relations. Mister President now is the time to fix the mistakes you made in the past and move the South African embassy to the capital city of Israel, Jerusalem. This will be a justified and positive move for South Africa and the international community as a whole. South African will be joining the United States of America, Guatemala and Australia in moving their embassies to Jerusalem. It is a common cause that South Africans constantly visit Israel for different reasons, either tourism or for religious reasons. Most religious faith groups from South Africa floods the streets of Jerusalem rather than Tel Aviv.

There are some that have argued that it is against international law to have an embassy in Jerusalem. This is a false notion and should be dealt with appropriately. Under the 1947 UN partition plan Jerusalem was supposed to be administered internationally in a “corpus seperatum” but this plan was rejected by the Palestinians and the Arab states in general even though it was accepted by Israel. Instead they declared war at the end of Israel held the western part of the city and Jordan held the eastern side. This situation changed in 1967 after the Arab states tried to invade again and lost Jerusalem control of the city. They no longer claim authority over the area. Israel’s presence in the city is accepted by the international community. Although elements of the international still cling to the idea of “corpus seperatum” but it is dead de facto and was established on dubious legal grounds to begin with. There is no legal impediment to establishing an embassy in Jerusalem.

South Africa’s foreign policy outlook is based on its commitment to the values and ideals of Pan-Africanism, solidarity with the people of the South and the need to cooperate with all peace-loving people across the globe in pursuit of shared prosperity and a just, equitable and rules-based international order. This puts South Africa in a favourable position to be a mediator in the Middle East conflict. Honorable President, by moving the embassy to Jerusalem you will be starting the much-needed dialogue between the involved parties. You will be in a position to play an integral role and use the same energy and wisdom you used in championing the interests of all South Africans in the CODESA negotiations. You for one, understand how difficult it can be to start a dialogue, however, you can comprehend the importance a dialogue can have. South Africa has foreign representation in 32 diplomatic missions in Asia and the Middle East. Strengthening the relationship with Israel will aid us in obtaining a seat at the negotiation table. We have the potential to serve as an encouraging force to all our counterparts in the Middle East to be active role players in the solution to the conflict.

The general goal for South Africa would be to ensure a multilateral relationship with all the involved parties in the Middle East and encourage peaceful engagement and dialogue. Recently we have seen the United Arab Emirates, Morocco, Bahrain and Sudan establishing and maintaining full diplomatic relationships with Israel, in times of peace. Mister President, you can remember and attest to the fact that South Africa managed to overcome the atrocities of the past simply because the country had willing leaders. A dialogue lead us to where we are today. We need to find a way as part of the international community to promote and advocate for dialogue in the Middle East. Our actions and the role we play in this area will determine our earnestness in dealing with the real issues on the ground.

A move of the South African Embassy to Jerusalem, the capital city of Israel, will be a move towards the right direction. A direction to start a peaceful dialogue, bringing both parties to the table and a move to deal with the real issues with intention of bringing about a workable solution.

Yours faithfully,

Klaas Mokgomole

Africans For Peace Head Coordinator