



## INCLUSIVE SOCIETY INSTITUTE

### **RESILIENCE FOR THE WORLD AND A GLOBAL RESILIENCE COUNCIL FOR THE UN**

*Speech by Ms Buyelwa Sonjica*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Resilience has never been more pertinent in a world rife with complexities and uncertainties. However, it is an idea frequently misinterpreted or reduced to simplicity. Far from being just a society's ability to recover from adversity, resilience is a complex and evolving attribute. It encapsulates a society's capability to face challenges directly, absorb shocks, and not merely recover but emerge more robust and better prepared for what lies ahead.

It embodies adaptability, ingenuity, and the transformative potential of communities and nations. In essence, resilience is not merely bouncing back; it's about progressing, enriched and fortified by our collective experiences. Thus, it is not simply a buzzword but a vital framework for understanding how societies can navigate the labyrinth of modern challenges.

In a time rife with escalating global challenges—including climate change, economic instability, cyber threats, pandemics and intricate conflicts—the resilience of societies across the globe is under stringent examination. This concept is inextricably linked to fragility, a state's incapacity to deliver essential services and maintain security, often accompanied by a high risk of conflict and violence. It's crucial to understand that neither fragility nor resilience is static; both are dynamic conditions that can evolve. Political stability, economic growth, and social cohesion can influence this evolution. Building resilience is a long-term commitment, demanding sustained effort, investment, and a nuanced approach. There are no quick fixes or one-size-fits-all solutions to the complex challenges of fragility and long-term development.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we traverse the intricate landscape of the 21st century, the inadequacy of our current governance frameworks in tackling multifaceted challenges becomes glaringly evident. Take, for example, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Conceived initially to ensure international peace and security, the UNSC has become increasingly paralysed by deep-seated political divisions among its permanent members. This paralysis has hindered its ability to respond to immediate crises and rendered it largely ineffective in addressing broader governance issues directly affecting long-term stability.

This limitation is emblematic of a broader problem: the failure of current international institutions to adapt to a swiftly evolving global landscape. The UNSC's focus on state-centric and military solutions often neglects the underlying causes of instability, such as economic inequality, social injustice, and

environmental degradation. These root issues demand multi-sectoral and long-term strategies, often absent in the Council's deliberations.

Consequently, the rise of new international groups like BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) underscores a critical point: when nations feel underrepresented or believe that existing institutions are failing, they seek alternative platforms to achieve their objectives. BRICS aims to amplify voices from the Global South in international forums and reform critical international financial institutions—such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organisation—making them more representative and responsive to the challenges confronting developing economies.

The recent BRICS Summit held in South Africa exemplifies this shift. Over 40 developing nations expressed interest in joining the group. Eventually, six new countries (Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates) were invited to join the group from January 1st, 2024. The current BRICS expansion will discuss the modalities, challenges and opportunities to increase trade in local currencies. It also aims to discuss how to create enhanced payment systems among developing economies.

This shift transcends a mere competition for influence with Western economies. It reveals that developing countries view the current stage of globalisation as fraught with risks. This perspective is intrinsically linked to the concept of resilience, both at local and international levels. By striving to reduce economic vulnerabilities and establish more robust financial systems, these nations are proactively building resilience outside the confines of existing institutions.

This is a compelling example of how resilience is not merely a local concern but a global imperative. It calls for coordinated, diversified strategies to navigate the complexities of our interconnected world, including the pressing debt challenges faced by African countries and the need for international financial institutions to offer more effective support. Inevitably, the evolving global order will have to address these resilience-linked issues sooner rather than later.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Conflict has been seen as a critical constraint for countries to achieve higher levels of resilience. However, a large body of evidence shows that militarised solutions are far from enough in dealing with conflicts. It requires focusing on the structural conditions that lead to violence, often reflecting deeper societal issues.

The UN Peacebuilding Commission, founded in 2005, was created to harness broader support to deal with the root causes of fragility and was initially envisioned as a pivotal catalyst for coordinating international and local responses. However, it has fallen short of rallying adequate political support from its member states. While its objectives were commendable, the Commission has been less successful in effectively synchronising international efforts. It is usually overlooked – and indeed undermined - by UN Security Council members, especially the Permanent Five (or P5).

So, what's the solution?

The Foundation for Global Governance and Sustainability has been championing the establishment of a Global Resilience Council. This proposed entity is designed to unify various agencies, stakeholders, and sectors under a single framework. Its mission is to facilitate long-term planning, acknowledging that resilience-building is a multifaceted, enduring, and cross-sectoral endeavour. The Council seeks to shift the focus from predominantly militarised solutions to fragility, concentrating instead on the structural and long-term conditions that enable fragile nations to build resilience.

This initiative represents a significant step towards adopting a more systematic approach to addressing fragility. It aims to enhance coordination among multi-sectoral strategies and bolster the international community's capacity to comprehend the interconnectedness of coordinated efforts for building resilient societies. Rather than viewing resilience through the narrow lenses of development, economics, or military strategy alone, the Council encourages us to see it as part of intricate systems that demand equally complex solutions.

It could serve as a nexus for diverse local, national, regional, and international actors. The Council could facilitate more effective national planning, support articulating a coherent societal vision for the future, and advocate for global strategies that transcend traditional, simplistic, and linear paradigms. What lessons can one take from the past decade's discussions on resilience?

Notably, there's no need to reinvent the wheel. For over a decade, several international organisations—including the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the African Development Bank—have been tailoring their strategies to focus on building more resilient societies. Their accumulated knowledge and experience can serve as valuable resources for the proposed Global Resilience Council.

Under the aid effectiveness global debates in the 2010s, the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding and the G7+, a coalition of self-identified fragile states, have highlighted the limitations of single-pronged, programmatic, and clustered approaches in building societal resilience. Such methods often fail to equip societies to cope with shocks and stresses effectively. Thus, many of these institutions have advanced their thinking and developed comprehensive matrices, indicators, and planning tools.

Exactly a decade ago, the African Development Bank's High-Level Panel on Resilience laid the groundwork for a comprehensive understanding of resilience that is remarkably congruent with the current proposal for a Global Resilience Council. The panel's recommendations offer a multi-pronged strategy that addresses the symptoms and the root causes of fragility. These insights are particularly relevant today, and yet, remain largely ignored:

1. **Invest in Regional Frameworks for Resilience:** The panel underscored the necessity of regional frameworks as a cornerstone for resilience. Such frameworks serve as platforms for cross-border coordination, facilitating collective action on shared challenges. These include security and economic issues like managing extractive industries and transboundary natural resources. By fostering regional cooperation, these frameworks can mitigate the risks of illegal trafficking and other forms of cross-border criminal activity. The call for robust regional

frameworks resonates strongly with the Global Resilience Council's objectives in a world where challenges are increasingly transnational.

2. **Build Effective States Through Inclusive Political Settlements:** The panel emphasised the role of inclusive political settlements in establishing resilient states. Inclusive governance ensures that state institutions are accountable and responsive, fostering a sense of trust between the state and its citizens. This is crucial for long-term stability and peace, as it addresses the underlying grievances that often fuel conflict. The panel's focus on inclusivity and accountability aligns well with the Global Resilience Council's aim to move beyond short-term, militarised responses to fragility, advocating for structural and long-term conditions that enable fragile states to build resilience.
3. **Draw on the Resilience Found in African Societies:** One of the panel's most compelling arguments is the need to harness the inherent resilience found within African societies. This includes leveraging the strengths of various sectors—the private sector, civil society, or local communities—to build resilience at the grassroots level. The panel advocates for interlocking institutions and partnerships at the community, state, and regional levels. This multi-layered approach ensures that resilience-building efforts are coordinated, sustainable, and effective over the long term.

Many of these recommendations could be taken in further refining the idea of the Global Resilience Council. Integrating these critical insights from the AfDB's High-Level Panel into the broader discourse can enrich our understanding of resilience as a complex, multidimensional construct. It also allows us to see the synergies between local, national, and international efforts, reinforcing the argument for a Global Resilience Council that is adaptive, inclusive, and deeply rooted in the realities of the communities it seeks to serve.

In conclusion,

The Global Resilience Council presents an innovative approach to tackling some of the most pressing challenges of our time. It offers a fresh perspective on global governance that is holistic and inclusive. However, its success will hinge on its ability to clearly define its mandate, secure political will, and ensure effective coordination among various stakeholders.

As we ponder the future of global governance, let us remember that resilience is not just about weathering storms; it's about transforming our systems to be better prepared for the challenges ahead. The Global Resilience Council could be a significant step in that direction. Still, it will require careful planning, a clear mandate, and a collective will to make it effective.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let us choose the path leading to a more resilient, equitable, and sustainable world. The Global Resilience Council could be the vehicle that takes us there, but it's up to us to ensure it's equipped for the journey.

Thank you for your attention.