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## **Rethinking North-South Relations**

*Speech delivered by Lars Klingbeil, SPD Party Chairman,*

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### **I. Introduction**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A fortnight ago today, I was sitting in the "Constitutional Room" of the Namibian Parliament in Windhoek. That is where the Namibian Constitution was signed in 1990 and the Republic of Namibia was born after decades of struggle to liberate the country from the South African occupying power. The SPD had politically supported the liberation struggle of our sister party, SWAPO, for many years. That is why we were welcomed in Windhoek as friends.

This is by no means something to be taken for granted. Where the Namibian Parliament meets today was once the seat of the German colonial administration during thirty years of colonial rule. And it was the German Schutztruppe that committed genocide against the Herero and Nama in the years between 1904 and 1908. Germany brought considerable suffering upon this country.

The German government is currently negotiating a reconciliation agreement with Namibia. This will not undo the crimes of the past, but it is important that we face up to our responsibility for what we did.

In my view, such a reconciliation process and acknowledgement of our colonial guilt – and not only in Namibia – is an important pillar of a new North-South policy, which is so urgently needed in times like these.

## **II. The legacy of Willy Brandt**

The SPD enjoys tremendous trust and confidence in the Global South. This is also because of German Social Democrats' resolute fight against the Nazi regime and fascism. And it also especially relates to Willy Brandt. I have experienced this on many of my visits.

Over the past two years, I have invested a lot of time in revitalising relations with our sister parties in the Global South. And along the way, I have once again become aware of the proud history of our party from a completely different angle.

We supported Chilean Socialists during the military dictatorship under Pinochet, Brazilian Socialists under the heels of military rule, the liberation struggles of the ANC in South Africa and SWAPO in Namibia. It was Willy Brandt who, back in the 1970s, called for a different, respectful approach to the Global South and worked

vigorously to nurture dialogue with parties and governments worldwide. He was ahead of his time, as an example from his memoirs shows. There he writes: "When a former President of the Swiss Confederation asked me in the summer of 1978 what brought me to Geneva so often and I told him that the secretariat of my North-South Commission was based there, he responded with sympathetic understanding: 'Ah, yes, always those Italians ...'"

The resolutions forwarded by Willy Brandt and his 18-member North-South Commission in 1980 and 1983 are visionary even from today's perspective. They are a guide to how everyone can survive in a globalised world. The report called for greater integration of poorer countries into the global economy and reforms of international organisations. It also warned of the impact of global challenges such as the climate crisis, movements of refugees, poverty, hunger and inequality. Many of these crises have become more severe down through the present day and many of Willy Brandt's most important pleas and entreaties have yet to be realised.

It was the way in which Willy Brandt approached the Global South that earned him tremendous respect down to this very day. Instead of looking down on countries in Africa, Latin America and Asia from a pedestal, Willy saw them as important partners when it comes to solving common challenges. In his memoirs he writes:

"I realised that it was in our own interest to help overcome misery and wretchedness in other parts of the world. I did not require any further explanation to convince me that for an accommodation of interests between North and South peace must also be part of the equation."

Modern development policy is also a policy for peace. If we are respected as partners in the Global South, we can influence crises and conflicts.

Whether during my visits to Chile, Brazil, South Africa, Namibia or even China, everywhere I go, my partners in dialogue take a respectful delight in relating to me their encounters with Willy Brandt. I am always a little envious because I never had the honour of meeting him in person.

He left us a legacy that we can still build on today. We owe to him the open doors that we Social Democrats enjoy today. These offer a great opportunity to stand up for understanding and cooperation. This is more urgent than ever in a world that has become more confusing and in which conflicts are mounting.

Willy Brandt initiated many important debates, even if many of his ideas are still waiting to be realised.

During the bipolar era of the Cold War, the superpowers displayed little interest in changing the structures of the international order. In the wake of the fall of the Iron Curtain, debates about a new North-

South policy were pushed even further into the background. For many observers, it was a matter of time before the whole world would only be made up of liberal market democracies. Samuel Huntington wrote about waves of democratisation; Francis Fukuyama even proclaimed the end of history. What an arrogant and erroneous misconception. History has never been at the end.

From the present-day perspective, it would appear that the political and economic promises characterising the Western development model have not materialised for many countries in the Global South. What many of us experienced as a time of peace, prosperity and security was often a continuation of crises in large parts of the Global South.

This has included economic structural adjustments as well as military interventions and the use of small arms, which were suddenly available in large quantities after the end of the Cold War.

This honesty is crucial if we want to lay the foundations for a new North-South policy today.

### **III. North-South policy in a multipolar world**

Today we live in a multipolar age. Almost two years ago, I was speaking at the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung's Tiergarten Conference about the fact that the world is no longer organised into poles, but rather into centres. These centres of power are attractive, they foster ties,

dependencies and cooperation. These centres are dynamic, and it is in everyone's interest to join them. Power is thus wielded differently today. This world order offers major advantages for a host of states because they are no longer forced to align with a bloc. They can select those issues on which they want to work with other actors as well as whom they want to work with. Negotiations between states are becoming even more important, but so are resilient and trusting relationships.

For many people and governments, especially in countries of the Global South, the multipolar world even holds out the promise of emancipation. This message is also openly communicated to me in my conversations. Where there has been dependence on the West for a lengthy period, there are now new, greater opportunities for cooperation or funding. Initiatives like BRICS are lending some countries in the Global South a voice in an international order whose institutions are heavily dominated by Western industrialised nations. Chinese investment in infrastructure is an attractive opportunity that we have failed to match in our development cooperation for too long.

At the same time, in most countries of the Global South, the majority of the population desires political and social participation, as surveys regularly indicate. Those who campaign for democracy and human rights in a multipolar world often do so on the foundation of values that we share.

The world has changed, as a glance at the balance of economic power shows. While the EU and the USA were still the economic centre of the world in 1990, together accounting for over 44 percent of global economic output, today their share has declined to just under one-third. And trending downwards. In the same period, China has raised its economic output almost fivefold, from four to 19 per cent of global economic output, tendency rising. Asia now accounts for almost 60 per cent of global economic output and world population. Here as well: tendency rising. Moreover, it is projected that by around 2050 a quarter of the world's population will be living in Africa.

Looking at the facts, it is apparent: Western hegemony has long since become a thing of the past. The West will remain economically and politically influential. But we in the West cannot solve a single global crisis on our own. And in order to safeguard our interests, we need new partnerships.

This requires rethinking on our part. The crises that we identify as top priorities are not necessarily assigned the same priority by others. Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar has aptly summed up the Global South's expectations of Europeans: "Europe must grow out of the mindset that Europe's problems are the world's problems, but the world's problems are not Europe's problems."

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Against this backdrop, these last few years rocked by crisis have truly put relations between Europe and the Global South to the test. The distribution of vaccines during the coronavirus pandemic was perceived by many countries in the Global South as lacking solidarity.

When Russia invaded Ukraine in contravention of international law, many Western politicians called on the countries of the Global South to join in the sanctions. They were initially blind to the devastating economic and social impact sanctions would have on these countries.

The moral undertone that has often been audible in the debate has provoked aggravation and annoyance. The majority of states in the Global South condemn the Russian invasion and breach of international law, but are not prepared to bear the costs of a war in Europe.

We are currently facing an even more complicated test with the escalation of the crisis in the Middle East. Hamas' brutal terrorist acts perpetrated against innocent Israelis have triggered revulsion and horror worldwide.

In the wake of these cowardly attacks, we rightly voiced our solidarity with the state of Israel and its people. There is no justification for these brutal murders.



The actions of the Israeli army in Gaza soon enough sparked outrage, however, particularly in the Global South, with accusations of double standards on the part of the West to be heard loud and clear. I experienced this in no mistaken terms in discussions during my trip to Africa a fortnight ago. Why does the West condemn the destruction of civilian infrastructure in Ukraine, but not in Gaza? Why is Germany not distancing itself more strongly from Israel, with more than 25,000 civilians dead in Gaza, including many women and children?

Israel has a right to self-defence. This goes hand in hand with the responsibility to respect international law itself and to ensure the proportionality of the operations in Gaza. Considerable doubts exist in this regard, however, and we need to also clearly articulate these doubts if we are to be perceived as credible when we call for respect for international law.

In Johannesburg, I spoke with South African Foreign Minister Naledi Pandor about the dramatic situation in Gaza.

South Africa is one of the most outspoken critics of the actions being taken by the Israeli government.

We have different points of view and perspectives in this regard. We discussed our different perspectives, including German history, which dictates a major responsibility for Israel's security, and this also greatly influences us today. We talked about the South African struggle for liberation and the historically evolved solidarity with the

Palestinians.

And, finally, we spoke above all about common interests: How there must be an end to the killing and dying and much more humanitarian aid must arrive in Gaza, that the Israeli hostages must be released quickly and a sustainable ceasefire must be achieved and how peace and security in the region can only be attained over the long term in the form of a two-state solution. And that we must make a commitment to achieving this.

We don't have to agree on every point; we can engage in tough debates. But the conflicts of our time can only be resolved if we treat our partners' perspectives with respect. Not by taking a moralising stance. It is important to allow for differences while at the same time being able to recognise common interests. In such moments, dialogue is key. That's why it was so important for me to travel to South Africa at this juncture and to seek just such a dialogue.

Today's world is not black and white; it is characterised by many shades of grey. We must learn how to navigate this new world. A multipolar world requires more dialogue, more diplomacy, more cooperation.

This is very fundamental and elementary. We need to align our foreign, security and development policy with this new world. We need to invest much more in strategic partnerships in order to defend our values and interests. This is also a learning process for us, which we want to approach in an open manner.

I am very grateful to Federal Chancellor Olaf Scholz for drawing important lessons from the seismic shift in the geopolitical situation. No other Federal Chancellor has travelled to Africa, Asia and Latin America so often in their first two years in office. Olaf Scholz has invited countries from the Global South to G7 meetings and campaigned for the African Union to become a member of the G20. This is an important step in gaining traction for a new North-South policy.

We need staying power. We cannot build trust and confidence overnight. There will always be discord and differing interests that necessitate communication, explanation and justification.

In my view, we therefore need a democratisation of the international order to be able to establish a new North-South policy on a structural footing. We can only defend a rules-based order if we are prepared to reform it.

My travels and discussions over the last few years have shown me that we have a lot in common with countries of the Global South. It has shown me that we are partners of first choice. However, this also means that we have a responsibility to make fair offers that are mutually beneficial. Because, unlike in the past, the countries of the Global South have long since discovered new alternatives. For many years, Russia and China were present as options, back in the days when we took little interest in the Global South. We can no longer afford to do this if we want to safeguard our interests and values in a

multipolar world over the long haul.

A new North-South policy is of crucial importance to our prosperity and security.

#### **IV. A new North-South policy**

I would like to trace out a few fields of action that I believe are key when discussing the cornerstones for a new North-South policy.

##### *a. Policies for a global socio-ecological transformation*

The first topic is the fight against the climate crisis. This topic is omnipresent in all my travels and it is absolutely clear that a global response is an absolute must. What is furthermore needed, however, is solutions that work for all parties. The discussions I have had on this topic in South Africa, Brazil and India have frequently reminded me of the domestic political debates we have been having in Germany in recent years.

Many countries in the Global South perceive the debate on climate protection that we are initiating as a call to forego growth and prosperity. They quite rightly point out that we in Europe have achieved our prosperity through colonialism, coal, oil and

gas, often through exploitation of resources in the Global South.

The countries of the Global South also have an interest in, and a right to strive for, prosperity and growth and to improve the quality of life of their citizens. The debate over renunciation and getting by with less reduces acceptance of climate policy. We have also experienced this here in Germany. In the last election campaign, we Social Democrats successfully managed to establish a link between climate protection and economic policy. A climate-friendly modernisation of our economy and society promotes innovation, creates new jobs and stimulates new growth. It is precisely this discourse that we must also carry on at the international level. As Social Democrats, we have tremendous credibility in this field.

On top of this, there is the social dimension of climate policy, which we Social Democrats also never tire of emphasising. In South Africa today, over 80 per cent of electricity is generated with coal. During my travel there, someone joked that South Africa is like the Lusatia region in Germany.

So when we press for climate protection through our development cooperation, we must also always keep structural policy and the accommodation of social interests in mind. The German government has established "Just Energy Transition Partnerships" (JETP) with countries in the Global South, including Vietnam, Indonesia and South Africa, to support them in transforming their energy production.

The agreement with South Africa has been widely criticised there, particularly by the trade unions, because the social dimension was not sufficiently taken into account. I am very grateful to our Minister of Development Cooperation, Svenja Schulze, for taking this criticism seriously and intensifying the dialogue with the trade unions. At the same time, we are committed to ensuring that the social dimension and dialogue with the social partners are taken into account right from the outset in the agreement currently being negotiated with Senegal. In my view, this is a good example of what a modern North-South policy can look like.

Another point that always crops up in discussions is local value creation. When we enter into new climate and resource partnerships with countries in the Global South, our partners rightly demand that these partnerships also create jobs and growth. In future, our development cooperation will need to focus more on social and ecological developments at the local level. This includes, for example, not only importing green hydrogen to Europe from the Global South, but also investing in the production of facilities locally and thus in new jobs.

Or by ensuring that the extraction of rare earths is followed by initial processing on site along transparent and resilient supply chains.

These are fair offers that also distinguish us from countries such as China or Russia, which often remove raw materials from the country without regard for social and environmental standards and without investing in sustainable development prospects locally. This also means that multinational enterprises and private investors must pay their taxes where they generate their profits. The global minimum tax of 15 per cent is an important first step in this direction.

These are strategies that we can pursue effectively in our bilateral cooperation as Germany, the European Union or with other partners. Such strategies also contribute to achieving the goals of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which continue to be of pivotal importance to us.

The second major area that I believe we need to tackle is democratisation of the international order.

*b. Democratisation of the international order*

Germany benefits more than almost any other country from a rules-based international order. One in four jobs in this country depends on exports. Rising prices, unstable supply chains: The crises of recent years have shown how crises and conflicts in the world affect our lives.

States like Russia are attacking the rules-based order or, like China, are trying to organise it to suit their own parochial interests. Our focus must therefore be on defending the rules-based international order, but also on reforming it. That is the only way we can guarantee peace, security and sustainable growth over the long term.

One focus in this respect is at the same time on the United Nations, which reflects the balance of power in the wake of the Second World War. The world has changed since then, however. States of the Global South have a legitimate interest in helping to shape the global order. For the United Nations to have a viable future as the guardian of a rules-based international order, reforms are needed that better reflect the balance of power in today's multipolar world. One focus here is on reform of the Security Council. In the so-called G4 initiative, Germany, Brazil, India and Japan pledged almost 20 years ago to mutually support each other in their endeavours to obtain a permanent seat on the Security Council. We also need to support initiatives that ensure better representation of Africa.

Another focus must be on reforming international financial institutions. Svenja Schulze is driving forward important improvements at the World Bank without neglecting the core mission of fighting poverty. It is right and proper that investment in public goods such as education, health, infrastructure, climate protection or biodiversity should be assigned much greater weight in the work of



the World Bank and regional development banks.

The dramatic increase in national debt as a result of the pandemic is preventing many countries from investing in the future. We need a sustainable solution for these debt crises in the international community. We must ensure that International Monetary Fund programmes protect social participation when debt crises flair up, that these programmes prevent inequality and that we do not repeat the past mistakes of neoliberal structural adjustment programmes.

## **V. Conclusion**

I believe it is worth continuing to work intensively on these issues, even if change will take some time. The moment will come when a window opens to tackle these reforms. One window may present itself sooner, another may take longer.

As an international movement, we Social Democrats have the great advantage of being able to work closely with progressive parties, trade unions and social movements all over the world.

If we strengthen these alliances, we can also change the world for the better.

In my capacity as Party Chairman, I signed a cooperation agreement with President Lula's Brazilian Workers' Party last year, initiating a party dialogue. German and Brazilian MPs are currently working on a joint position paper for the next climate conference. We have concluded an agreement with the Mongolian People's Party to strengthen our cooperation to promote a resilient democracy. We are now working on a cooperation agreement with the South African ANC on how we can jointly strengthen the rules-based order. We have intensified our dialogue with partners all over the world.

I think this is what has made Social Democratic policies strong throughout the party's history and also makes them strong today. We are united by the awareness and conviction that we can only solve global challenges together. The fundamental Social Democratic values of freedom, justice and solidarity have always been practised internationally by our party.

We need more solidarity and cooperation instead of confrontation. Even if we have different perspectives on conflicts and crises, there are always interests and values that bring us together.

Identifying these is more important today than ever before, especially in times when right-wing extremist and populist forces are networking globally to spread their destructive, toxic nationalist ideology. They have no answers when it comes to making the world a better place. We, on the other hand, do.

The foundations for this is a new North-South policy, which we as German Social Democrats want to put our stamp on in the coming years. As Party Chairman, I will be pushing this forward and would like to invite you to join the discussion. Tonight and in the future.

Thank you very much!