Mr President,

I want to add my country’s voice in congratulating His Excellency Sheikh Abdullah Bin Nasser Al Thani, the Prime Minister and Minister of Interior for election as the President of the 13th United Nations Crime Congress. I wish to assure you of my delegation’s full support as you guide this congress to a successful outcome. Similarly, I express our profound gratitude to the Government of the State of Qatar for graciously hosting this important gathering and the hospitality accorded to our delegation.

Mr President,

My delegation associates itself with the statements delivered on behalf of the African Group as well as the Group of 77 and China, respectively. In addition, I have the honour to highlight the following points on behalf of the Government of the Republic of South Africa.

Since the dawn of our young democracy in 1994, South Africa has been engaged in a national project of transformation, aimed at transforming government, civil society and the economy. With our pre-democracy history of oppression and human rights violations under Apartheid, it is of particular importance for South Africa to continue to play an active role in the protection and promotion of all human rights. South Africa has therefore consistently demonstrated that it is fully committed to the protection, promotion and enjoyment of all human rights.
human rights and fundamental freedoms including the right to development. It is the view of my government that fighting crime and corruption and promoting the rule of law is central to the full realisation and the practical enjoyment of the rights enshrined in the Constitution. Crime (especially organised crime) and corruption undermine the legitimacy and authority of the state and also deprive ordinary citizens, particularly the vulnerable members of society, of the right to basic services and sustainable livelihood.

It is in this context that South Africa, through its National Development Plan - Vision 2030 - is on a continuous basis, developing and promoting measures to build an effective and resilient criminal justice system and respect for the rule of law, as these elements are in our view crucial for achieving sustainable development.

Mr President,

While challenges still remain, I am pleased to inform this Congress that our efforts to build better and safer communities in our country are gaining momentum. Since the adoption of the Salvador Declaration in 2010, South Africa has continued to make significant strides in reducing the level of crime, especially organised crime. This can be attributed to a combination of measures amongst others, improving law enforcement efforts; socio-economic interventions; the reduction of poverty and the improvement of the quality of life in general. This has also improved investor confidence in our young and vibrant democracy.

Mr President, ladies and gentlemen,

As already indicated the theme of this Congress resonates with our developmental agenda. During the Congress we will have the opportunity to participate in various parallel workshops and side events where we will provide more information on progress made in many of the areas that are relevant to the theme of this Congress and its agenda.

However, allow me to highlight the following few key points:

1. We are making progress in combating money-laundering, corruption and transnational organized crime through, inter alia, effective implementation of financial intelligence tools, such as the goAML. This allows us to track the illicit financial flows of criminal networks. Consistent with the resolution adopted by the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ) in 2014, we encourage the UNODC to continue availing this software to requesting Member States.
2. More than two decades after the adoption of the Palermo Convention on Transnational Organized Crime (TOC), countries, regions and the world in general are still grappling with challenges and threats posed by transnational organized crimes such as terrorism, corruption and money laundering. This is also applicable to South Africa. We are committed to implement, on a continuous basis, all activities required in implementing the Palermo Convention on Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols thereto and continue to support the work of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

3. We remain concerned about the illicit trafficking in illegal mining as well as in precious and non-precious metals, especially in view of its links to transnational organized crime. We therefore welcome the resolution tabled by the CCPCJ in 2013 that called for a detailed study on this subject. In this regard South Africa has recently made available to the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) an amount of 500 000 euros for this purpose. We are looking forward to the outcome of this study and further elaboration by the CCPCJ.

4. South Africa has passed the Prevention and Combating of Trafficking in Persons Act, 2013. The Act criminalizes trafficking in persons and related acts and also provides for extra-territorial jurisdiction. In the same year we also passed the Prevention and Combating of Torture of Persons Act, 2013, which gives effect to South Africa’s obligations arising from the United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. It creates a specific criminal offence of torture and related offences and provides for the prosecution of offenders.

5. Cybercrime remains a global threat and this calls for renewed efforts to combat this scourge. The initiative to negotiate a United Nations Convention against Cybercrime is supported and should be fast tracked.

6. The illicit trafficking in endangered species, in particular combating Rhino poaching, remains a challenge for many countries, including mine. There is no doubt we need to increase international cooperation and coordination efforts in countering this scourge.

7. Legal Aid South Africa has further done sterling work in advancing access to justice for indigent persons in need of legal representation, though there are still challenges in the sense that demand outweighs supply. We encourage Member
States to review and reform legal aid policies for expansion of access to legal aid in criminal proceedings and to develop national plans in accordance with the United Nations Principles and Guidelines on Access to Legal Aid in Criminal Justice Systems.

9. South Africa’s much admired Thuthuzela Care Centres, well known as models of good practice in the fight against rape and sexual violence, offer a unique one-stop, integrated response to incidents of violent sexual acts against women and children. Partnerships between government and civil society on service delivery to victims of crime hold the key to the success of the integrated Victim Empowerment Programme.

10. We successfully hosted the historic 4th Open-ended Intergovernmental Expert Group meeting for the review of the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (UN SMRs). Delegates to this meeting had an opportunity to visit Robben Island where Nelson Mandela spent a better part of his 27 years of imprisonment. We hope that those who have had the opportunity to visit Robben Island will be inspired to advocate for the promotion of a just and humane environment for the treatment of prisoners. This is one of the values that Nelson Mandela stood for. We hope that when the CCPCJ considers the adoption of the revised version of the UN SMRs, Member States will take his legacy to heart;

11. In advancing the rule of law, which is central to the United Nations agenda on addressing social and economic challenges, South Africa has passed the Superior Courts Act, 2013 (Act No. 10 of 2013) and the Constitution 17th Amendment Act. These laws affirm the independence of the judiciary and acknowledge the Chief Justice as the head of the judiciary with responsibility over the establishment and monitoring of norms and standards for the exercise of judicial functions of courts.

Mr President,

As I conclude, I wish to state that criminal activities and networks transcend national boundaries. It is therefore compelling that the efforts of the international community should seek to achieve collective solutions through the development and implementation of effective approaches in tackling transnational organised crime in all its forms and manifestations. It is for this reason that the African Union has prioritised the critical issue of the means of implementation. The United Nations programmes, agreed to collectively, do
not always take off successfully as a result of the lack of concrete and tangible agreement on the question of the means of implementation. In this context, we look forward to the outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Financing for Development scheduled for Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in July of this year. The goals set for achievement in the context of the Post-2015 Development Agenda will not be meaningful without clarity and a comprehensive approach on the critical matter of the means of implementation. Technical cooperation and capacity-building, in the form of technology and skills transfer, investment in technical training, among others, especially for developing countries, are important building blocks in enhancing Member States capacity to address transnational organised crime. This Congress therefore affords us a unique opportunity to integrate crime prevention and criminal justice into the Post-2015 Development agenda that will be adopted during the forthcoming session of the United Nations General Assembly. You can rely on South Africa’s support and commitment in this regard.

I thank you.