

***Interview of of the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
of the Russian Federation to the Republic of Botswana Victor I. Sibilev
at the reception on the occasion of Russia Day***



**1. What can you tell about the Russia Day?
Why is this holiday so important for Russia and its
citizens?**

Russia Day is a rather young national holiday of the Russian Federation celebrated on the 12th of June since 2002. It commemorates the establishment of the new Russian state, which emerged from the former Soviet Union. This day allows Russian people not only to assess our achievements in the past but also to shape new plans and look into the future together with our partners and friends.

Russia is a federative state, which is comprised of 85 autonomous subjects with more than 200 nationalities living in them. Each people, republic and region of the federation present their unique history and culture, this is why Russia is very diversified and tolerant to other cultures and traditions.

It is worth mentioning that there are a lot of similarities between Russia and Botswana. Both countries are rich in mineral resources producing, for example, more than the 50% of the world's rough diamonds, both are friendly and hospitable to foreigners and have their own unique customs and traditions that define them as a nation.

**2. This year the world is commemorating 75th Anniversary of the
Victory in the Second World War. The former USSR made a significant
contribution to the fight against Nazi Germany. What does this memorable
date mean for Russians?**

It is well-known that sixty-one nations and almost 80% of the planet's population were dragged into World War II. The burning storm ravaged not only through Europe, but also through Asian and African nations. It reached the shores of the Arctic and Indian Oceans, the borders of Egypt and Australia.

However, the most brutal and crucial events which determined the drama and the outcome of that inhuman war unfolded on the territory of the Soviet Union. The war claimed lives of about 27 million Soviet citizens with 6.8 million military personnel killed and 4.4 million taken prisoner and missing in action. Over four years 17 hundred urban and 70 thousand rural settlements were destroyed; more

than 30 thousand industrial enterprises were eliminated. Nazis expected to enslave our people and totally destroy the country.

Their plans failed. The Soviet army stopped the Nazis nearby Moscow. And over the three subsequent years, it managed not only to resist the assault but also to force the enemy back into its lair. The Red Army together with its allies, the USA and Great Britain, marked the victorious end to the war by liberating Europe, waging the battle for Berlin.

Victory Day is the dearest, the most emotional and the most inclusive commemoration in the Russian Federation. For the people of the former Soviet Union, it will forever remain a day of the people's great heroic deed, and for the countries of Europe and the entire planet – the day on which the world was saved.

It obliges us to be highly responsible and realise more profoundly on the edge of what deadly precipice the world found itself at that time; the kind of terrible consequences to which violence and racial hatred, genocide and outrage committed against human beings could have led.

3. Traditionally the Victory Parade is held in Moscow on May 9. What about this year?

Unfortunately, due to the pandemic President V.Putin took the decision to postpone the celebration of the Victory Parade with participation of high foreign guests, including the heads of state and government, as well as a large group of WWII foreign veterans to June 24 when in 1945 the first historic Victory Parade was held.



Historical Victory Parade at the Red Square, Moscow June 24, 1945

Moreover, every five years the respective resolution of the UN General Assembly is prepared. In this regard, the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov

said that the partners who co-sponsored this resolution reached an agreement to submit the document to the General Assembly when it resumes its normal work.

4. I've heard this year Russia is going to change its Constitution. Could you tell us more about amendments?

First it was expected to hold Nationwide Vote on amendments on April 22. However, to avoid health risks to citizens of the Russian Federation posed by COVID-19, the President resolved to change the date on July 1.

The amendments will touch the increase of the minimum wage, pensions, benefits and other social aids, the correlations between the decisions of interstate bodies and the Constitution of the Russian Federation as well as the policy protecting the historical truth and the future of our country.

Speaking about amendments in general it is necessary to underline that they are prepared in accordance with the Russian legislation, international law and the will of our citizens. Foundations of the constitutional order and rights of people will not be touched by these amendments.

5. On October 23-24, 2019, your country hosted the Russia-Africa Summit and Economic Forum. How can you describe its importance for Russia-African relations?

Africa remains one of the most important partners for Russia. The first Russia-Africa Summit was attended by delegations from all 54 African states, 45 of which were represented by their heads of state, as well as heads of the executive bodies of the African Union and other leading regional organisations, including SADC Executive Secretary Dr. Stergomena Tax.



Russia-Africa Summit in Sochi, October 23, 2019

The political Declaration adopted at the end of this significant event established a completely new dialogue mechanism: the Russia–Africa Partnership Forum, which will be held every three years. Between the summits, current and practical issues will be addressed at the annual political consultations between foreign ministers of Russia and the African countries.

The Summit was followed by the Economic Forum unprecedented by its scale. The package of commercial documents, including over 50 contracts worth about 15.5 billion dollars was signed on the sidelines of the Forum. The main objective of this important event is to double the current trade volume with the continent in the next several years.

I have to say that Russian companies successfully operate in Africa in such areas as the oil and gas industry, geological exploration, extraction of raw materials, agriculture, fishery and high technologies.

6. It is known that Russia is a BRICS Chair in 2020. What could be their contribution of the five countries to the international corona virus response?

You are absolutely right by saying that the combined economic potential of BRICS member-states has reached a third of the global GDP at purchasing power parity. Last year BRICS even outperformed G7 on this indicator by 12% in 2019. In this regard the Russian Federation who holds the BRICS Chairmanship this year has initiated the extraordinary meeting of the BRICS foreign ministers through videoconference, which was held on 28 April, to discuss how the five countries can contribute to the global efforts against the spread of the coronavirus. The main focus of the discussion was on the efficiency increase of the countries' efforts in fighting this threat.

The BRICS Ministers of Foreign Affairs covered the mechanisms for improving the exchange of experience as well as providing mutual aid. The ministers analyzed the impact of the current crisis on international relations and summed up that there is no other alternative but to pursue equal, non-politicised cooperation of sovereign states in addressing all topical issues on today's agenda.

Russia has stated its specific joint crisis response measures to fight coronavirus infection. This is a fairly large package of measures relating not only to the healthcare sector, but also to the economy, trade, financial stability and employment support. It was agreed that Russia would submit them for substantive discussion at the upcoming meetings of the relevant departments of the five countries.

7. On March 6, 2020, Russia and Botswana have celebrated 50th Anniversary of diplomatic relations. How can you describe this event and the state of Botswana-Russia relations in general?

Russia and Botswana have been enjoying longstanding ties of friendship, mutual respect and cooperation for decades. Starting from the pre-independence period our country has always supported Botswana, as well as other African states, in their desire to shape their own destiny.

Russia and Botswana have succeeded in expanding the legal framework of their bilateral relations. At present there are eleven bilateral documents signed by the respective governments and ministries of the two countries. Furthermore, together with our Botswana partners we are working on several interministerial MOUs and other agreements which are designed to expand our cooperation in the fields of healthcare, environmental protection, industry and investment.

Our countries enjoy a long-standing cooperation in the sphere of education. Russia is engaged in the training of Botswana specialists in different areas, including mining, engineering, medicine, IT and others under the Memorandum of Understanding signed by the then Minister of Education and Skills Development Dr. Unity Dow in Moscow in June 2016. In accordance with the MOU the quota of the Russian government scholarships annually allocated to Botswana has been increased up to 30, out of them 5 – for medical specialties.

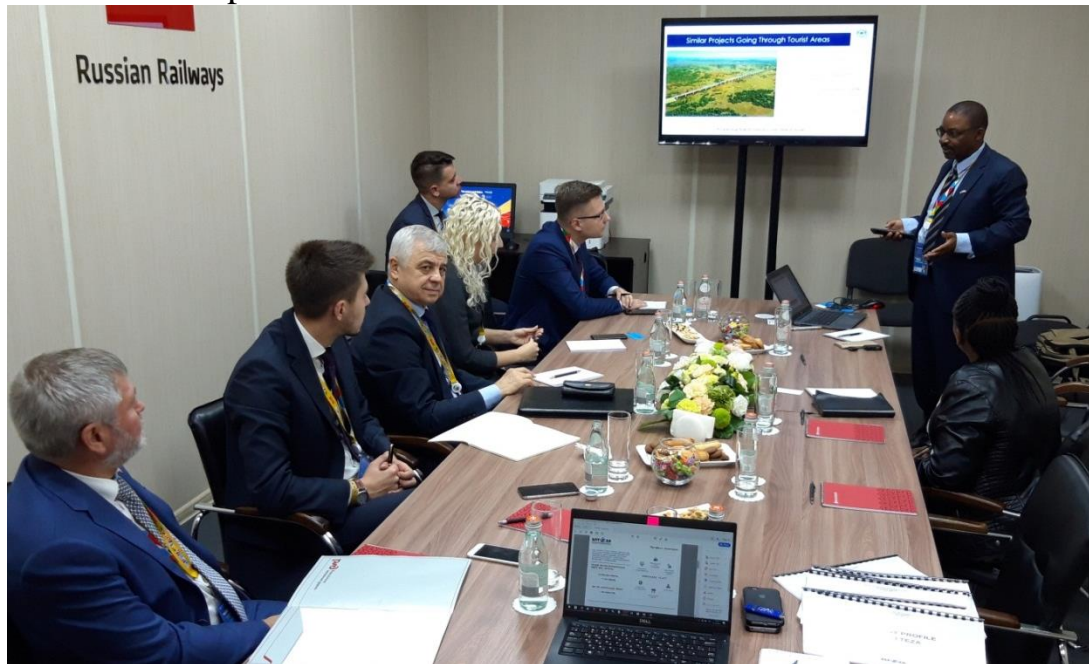
At present, about 300 Botswana students study at Russian universities, both on state-sponsored and contract basis. Russia as well supports Botswana Police Service, mainly through provision of sponsorship for short-term skills development courses and programmes of higher education.

I would like to tell you that reception on this occasion that took place in the National Museum in Gaborone on the 6th of March, 2020, was a great success. It was attended by a great number of both active and retired Botswana politicians, including the third President of Botswana H.E. F. Mogae, Assistant Minister for Presidential Affairs, Governance and Public Administration D. Mthimkhulu and former Ministers of International Affairs and Cooperation G. Chiepe and P. Venson-Moitoi, along with representatives of business community and media.

8. Would you please show us the level of trade and economic cooperation between Russia and Botswana and their partnering in Kimberly Process?

The economic and trade relations between our countries based on the principals of equality and mutual benefit are considered as sectors of high potential. In 2019 the trade volume between Russia and Botswana increased by 23% up to \$32 mln. It is still less than our desire. The diamond export/import

operations hold the biggest share of the external trade of the two countries. We hope that the export-oriented policy of the government of Botswana in the field of capacity building of local industries and agricultural producers will facilitate export of Botswana product to the Russian market.



Talks between Botswana Railways and Russian Railways in Sochi, October 23, 2019

Besides this we count on cooperation between Russian and Botswana companies in such crucial spheres as infrastructure, manufacturing, energy and water resources. As a good example of the keen interest of the Russian companies namely Russian Helicopters, Institute Hydroproject and some other business entities to collaboration with Botswana partners is their participation in Global Expo Botswana in 2019. In turn representatives of Botswana Railways visited the railway products exhibition near Moscow and participated in Russia-Africa Economic Forum in Sochi.

As for the Kimberley Process the cooperation between our countries is increasingly growing. The Russian Federation and the Republic of Botswana, as Chair and Vice-Chair have confirmed their commitment to closer coordination of efforts within the framework of the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme to implement the agreements achieved in Dubai in 2018 and in Delhi in 2019. The two sides by working in a constructive and friendly manner have made significant contribution to adoption of resolution «The Role of Diamonds in Fuelling Conflicts» in UN General Assembly in April 2020. The approval of this document makes the work of the organization more effective and its authority stronger.

9. What initiatives concerning the fight against COVID-19 does Russia promote in the world?

On March 26, 2020, Vladimir Putin, the President of the Russian Federation, participated in the Extraordinary Virtual Leaders' Summit of the Group-20 (G20) and suggested several initiatives on measures to counter Covid-19.



G 20 Extraordinary Summit on March 26, 2020

Our President proposed to continue a regular exchange of credible information about the pandemic's progress in the G20 countries and the actions being taken. He also emphasized that it would be necessary to provide aid to the African countries especially to strengthen their health systems.

Speaking about the role of the World Health Organisation he said that it should channel its efforts to detecting hidden coronavirus epidemics in the countries that are not able to organise testing. A joint research by the G20 countries could also significantly expedite the development of vaccines and medications. The G20 is to consider creating a special fund under the auspices of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), so that any IMF member would be able to borrow money from this fund at a zero rate for the long term.

Moreover, all trade wars and sanctions should be postponed. Furthermore, now it is of paramount importance to create so-called green corridors, free for the mutual supply of food, medicines and aid in general.

10. What interventions has Russia made to help Africa and other countries to deal with the impact of COVID-19?

The rapid spread of the novel coronavirus changed life on the planet virtually overnight. It also became a crush test for international relations. In this situation the Russian Federation has made a significant contribution to the global efforts to restrain the spread of the coronavirus infection COVID-19.

Our assistance to the common struggle was rooted through various mechanisms. In this regard I'd like to mention our participation in realization of the UNDP global COVID-19 response programme. Russia recently signed a memorandum on the next \$30 million replenishment of the Russia Federation-UNDP Trust Fund Development. The bigger part of this sum will be utilized for the benefit of many low income countries that have been engaged in hard struggle to preserve jobs and livelihoods and to maintain food and social stability.



Russian specialists disinfecting medical facilities in Bergamo, Italy, March 27, 2020

Besides this, Russia already has rendered international assistance to various countries. Supplies of medical equipment, sanitizers, masks and medical clothing were delivered to the Italian Republic, the Republic of Serbia, People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, the Republic of South Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Commonwealth of Independent Countries. Also Russia upon the invitation of the Italian and Serbian governments send its troops of bacteriological defense to provide decontamination inside and outside civil and medical institutions in these countries.

There is one point that should be mentioned – the politisation of humanitarian issues. You know that some Western countries stand for continuation of unilateral economic restrictions. This means that they have desire to use the pandemic to punish the undesirable governments. Such sanctions limit people's ability to use rights and seriously impede efforts to protect health, striking a blow at the most vulnerable groups.