



South Africa's New Ambassador to the U.S., H.E. Ebrahim Rasool, to Focus on Commercial Relations

South Africa's new Ambassador to the United States of America, H.E. Ebrahim Rasool, the former Premier (Governor) of Western Cape – South Africa presented his credentials to President Obama on August 10, 2010. Soon thereafter, he briefed CCA member companies on his perceptions of the bilateral U.S.-South Africa commercial and political relationship. The Ambassador's September 15, remarks at CCA's offices predominantly focused on retooling South Africa's mission to the U.S. to a largely commercial and economic one.

Ambassador Rasool told the group of 45 businesses, government officials, and multi-lateral institutions that he is the most fortunate Ambassador South Africa has had, as he is taking his post at a time when the U.S. and the rest of the world are eager to do business with South Africa – as proven by the World Cup. Rasool views his position and the embassy's mission shifting from a predominately political agenda to a stronger focus on economic dialogue. Specifically, Rasool is calling for a 60:30:10 strategy to the embassy's work: 60 percent of the embassy's resources will concentrate on economic diplomacy (trade, investment, tourism, regional trade); 30 percent on socio-political diplomacy; and the remaining 10 percent on consular work.

Ambassador Rasool stressed that we (U.S. & South Africa) must work to breakdown the perception that Africa is one place and instead view it as a continent of provinces. He confirmed that South Africa is a regional power in Southern Africa as it possesses the three critical components investors seek in a country: rule of law; a global banking system; and internationally recognized legal system. However, he warned against devoting too much interest only in South Africa. Rasool commented that the U.S. and South Africa have a great opportunity for cooperation on the continent and singled out the agro-processing industry as sector ripe for joint ventures.

Ambassador Rasool points to South Africa's and the broader continent's capital finance gap as an underlying factor to the pull towards the "East". To avoid dependency, Rasool would like to have greater competition from the "West".