



**STATEMENT BY**

**THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE SADC PF**

**REGIONAL WOMEN’S PARLIAMENTARY**

**CAUCUS (RWPC),**

**HON. ANNE MARIE MBILAMBANGU**

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE OFFICIAL**

**OPENING OF THE 48<sup>TH</sup> PLENARY**

**ASSEMBLY VIRTUAL SESSION**

**ON 4<sup>th</sup> of DECEMBER 2020**

## **SALUTATIONS**

- Guest of Honour, His Excellency Felix Tshisekedi, President of the Republic of Congo.
- Hon. Speaker Esperanca Laurinda Francisco Nhiuane Bias, SADC PF President & Speaker of the National Assembly of the Republic of Mozambique.
- Speakers of SADC National Parliaments and Heads of Delegation.
- Hon. Senator Isaac Mmemo Magagula, the SADC PF Vice President.
- Ms Boemo Sekgoma, SADC PF Secretary General.
- Members of the SADC Parliamentary Forum.
- Distinguished Invited Guests.
- Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is my honour to address you on the occasion of this 48th Plenary Assembly Virtual Session. I bring maternal greetings from all the Women Parliamentarians of the SADC region.

Allow me to add my voice in expressing my deepest thoughts to all those who have lost loved ones due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I also wish to extend a sisterly embrace to those who have fought and won the battle against the Coronavirus.

Despite all the challenges we have faced this year, individually and collectively, it is quite heartening to note that we have nonetheless remained resolute. The same spirit of resilience must

continue to inspire hope in us as we look forward to a brighter 2021.

Guest of Honour and Distinguished Delegates,

It is an undeniable fact that the events of 2020 have given us many unforgettable life lessons. Firstly, the COVID-19 pandemic laid bare how vulnerable humanity can be, despite all our best efforts. The year also taught us that *“In every crisis, doubt or confusion, [we should] take the higher path - the path of **compassion, courage, understanding and love,**”* to quote in the words of author Amit Ray, in his book, *Nonviolence: The Transforming Power*.

Guest of Honour and Distinguished Delegates,

While COVID-19 has manifestly taken a heavy toll on our countries' economies, jobs and people's lives in general, we dare not forget the reality of the disproportionality of its impact on women and girls.

In calling for increased political commitment towards gender equality, allow me to echo the words of Chinese President, Xi Jinping, who in his address to the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women to commemorate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Beijing Platform, on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2020, said:

I quote:

*“While posing unprecedented challenges, COVID-19 also presents an opportunity for us to draw lessons from it and reshape the future. Global development needs to be placed on a course that is more equal, inclusive and sustainable, and women's development is an important criterion to gauge its progress. Protection of women's rights and interests must become the commitment at the national level. As we pursue post-COVID recovery, may we create new opportunities for women to participate in decision making and be more involved in national, economic, cultural and social governance. We need to eliminate prejudice, discrimination and violence against women and make gender equality a social norm and moral imperative observed by all.”*

End of quote.

As the Regional Parliamentarian Women’s Caucus, we pledge to endeavour to ensure that our Member States post-COVID recovery and developmental trajectory encompass women's development and gender equality.

Guest of Honour and Distinguished Delegates,

Allow me to commend the progress that SADC PF is making towards the development of the SADC Model Law on Gender-Based Violence. This milestone intervention will no doubt go a long way in breaking the barriers towards gender equality by

addressing legislative and policy gaps that exist within our Member States.

As we deliberate on matters of regional interest and concern during this Plenary Assembly Session, I wish to reiterate that our discussions should go beyond seeking to correct the long-standing inequalities that women face and pay equal attention to the building of resilient communities that are sensitive to the difficulties women and girls are facing.

Guest of Honour and Distinguished Delegates,

Indeed, we should envision a post-COVID-19 SADC region where women and girls enjoy peace, sexual and reproductive health rights and have access to services, education and information, and are guaranteed of the full menu of rights, in line with the various regional and international instruments.

Guest of Honour and Distinguished Delegates,

Allow me to commend SADC PF and National Parliaments for the sterling work that they are doing to facilitate access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services for all without discrimination in Member States through the Sexual, Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) Programme.

I also wish to call on them to continue to be vigilant and make concerted efforts towards ensuring that the domestication of the

regional blueprint for gender equality, namely, the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, suffers no setbacks.

Let us continue to hold our executive arms and the political leadership accountable on the commitments they made through this Protocol. The RWPC pledges to remain your steadfast companion in this regard, through sustained amplification of women and girls' issues until gender equality becomes a reality in our region.

Guest of Honour and Distinguished Delegates,

As we ponder about the post-COVID SADC, allow me to leave you with the words of the Irish-American comedian and actor, Johnny Corn who, while contemplating the same question, said:

I quote:

*“We have a chance to do something extraordinary. As we head out of this pandemic, we can change the world. Create a world of love. A world where we are kind to each other. A world where we are kind no matter what class, race, sexual orientation, what religion or lack of or what job we have. A world we don't judge those at the food bank because that may be us if things were just slightly different. Let love and kindness be our roadmap.”*

Close quote:

I thank you.