



VOTE OF THANKS
BY HON. PHANDU TOMBOLA CHAHA
SKELEMANI, SPEAKER OF THE NATIONAL
ASSEMBLY OF BOTSWANA

ON
THE OCCASION OF THE OFFICIAL OPENING
OF THE 48TH PLENARY ASSEMBLY VIRTUAL
SESSION

ON 4TH DECEMBER 2020

SALUTATIONS

- Your Excellency Félix Tshisekedi, President of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).
- Hon. Speaker Esperança Laurinda Francisco Nhiuane Bias, Speaker of the National Assembly of the Republic of Mozambique & our SADC PF President.
- Hon. Jeannine Mabunda Lioko, Speaker of the National Assembly of the Republic of the Democratic Republic of Congo and Host of the SADC PF 48th Plenary Assembly Virtual Session.
- Hon. Speakers of SADC National Parliaments and Heads of Delegation.
- Hon. Anne-Marie Bilambangu, Chairperson of the Regional Women's Parliamentary Caucus.
- Honourable Members of the SADC Parliamentary Forum.
- Ms Boemo Sekgoma, SADC PF Secretary General.
- Distinguished Delegates.
- Our Most Valued Invited Guests.
- Ladies and Gentlemen.

I feel greatly honoured to propose a Vote of Thanks on the occasion of the Official Opening of the 48th Plenary Assembly Virtual Session of the SADC Parliamentary Forum.

On behalf of the SADC Parliamentary Forum and indeed on my own behalf, I would like to express our deepest gratitude to our Guest of Honour, His Excellency Félix Tshisekedi, President of the Democratic Republic of Congo, for gracing and officially opening this Plenary Session.

Guest of Honour,

Your poignant acknowledgement of SADC's role in supporting the peace process in the DRC over the years is particularly encouraging. This role by SADC attests to the interconnectedness of our region and is a recognition of the mutual dependence among Member States of our region. That is the essence of regional integration.

From the days of the Frontline States, SADC has always exhibited a strong sense of solidarity on matters of peace and security of all Member States. Indeed, SADC's role in the

DRC in this regard confirms the principle of African solutions for African challenges.

Guest of Honour,

We are also heartened by your Government's unwavering support for efforts to transform the SADC Parliamentary Forum, a respected regional institution that is now known internationally as one of those organisations which have a role to play in inter-parliamentary cooperation, into a SADC Parliament. It is a sad fact that a SADC Parliament remains the missing link in the region's political architecture and integration processes.

When established, the Regional Parliament will not only contribute towards the region's economic and political integration, but would also serve as a representative institution for the SADC citizenry. We remain convinced that when established, a SADC Parliament would become the legislative arm of SADC and would complement the role of the SADC Summit and the Council of Ministers through its oversight role and model law-making powers.

SADC is the only Regional Economic Community on the African continent without a Parliament. This is an unacceptable misnomer! We owe it to our region to correct this as a matter of urgency. We shall, therefore, continue to count on your resolute leadership, Your Excellency and the support of your Government to make the dream of a SADC Parliament a reality.

Guest of Honour, Distinguished Guests,

It would be remiss of me, if I did not take this opportunity, to also express our deep appreciation to Hon. Speaker Mabunda and through her, to the National Assembly of the DRC for meticulously and graciously hosting this 48th Virtual Plenary Assembly Session. While the “new normal” implies that we cannot be in the DRC physically, much against our desire, I would like to let you know that we all feel the warmth and generosity that you have extended to us. I give you our word that as soon as conditions allow for physical meetings, we will “return” to the DRC.

Guest of Honour, Distinguished Guests,

I also wish to thank the Speakers and Presiding Officers of our National Parliaments and all the delegates that are attending this Plenary Session. We draw inspiration from your unwavering commitment to the activities of the SADC Parliamentary Forum in spite of the various challenges we have been facing this year, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the outbreak of the African Migratory Locust, all of which are taking a toll on our economies.

Guest of Honour, Distinguished Guests,

We are grateful to our Secretary General, Ms. Boemo Sekgoma and her dedicated team from the Secretariat for a job well done in facilitating this virtual Plenary Assembly Session.

Guest of Honour, Distinguished Guests,

Since this is the last official event where we are meeting this year and given that we are a few weeks from 25th December,

please allow me to wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Prosperous 2021.

Lastly, may I also take this opportunity to extend a warm invitation to all the distinguished Speakers and delegations, to join us for the 49th Plenary Assembly, which my Parliament will host next year in 2021. As current circumstances relating to the COVID-19 pandemic do not allow for physical meetings, we commit to delivering yet another successful Plenary Assembly virtually.

I THANK YOU.