Opening Remarks by the President to the SADC Parliamentary Forum Executive Committee

September 2020
The Vice-President of the SADC Parliamentary Forum, Hon. Isaac M. Magagula;
The Host Speaker, Hon. Professor Peter H. Katjavivi;
Hon. Speakers and Hon. Members of the Executive Committee here present;
The Secretary General, Ms Boemo M. Sekgoma, and staff of the SADC PF;
Ladies and Gentlemen;
Comrades and Friends;

Let me begin by extending a warm and fraternal welcome to you all to this strategically important first virtual meeting of the Executive Committee. As you are well aware, the meeting is being convened against the backdrop of the debilitating COVID-19 pandemic which is currently ravaging our Region and the world at large, and has forced us to change the way we relate to each other and the way we do business. Indeed, we have no other choice. We cannot continue in the business as usual mode. We either adapt or get misplaced. In the words of the renowned historian, Charles Darwin,

It is not the strongest of species nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is the most adaptable to change, that lives within the means available and works co-operatively against common threats.

Accordingly, the survival and sustenance of our organisation and its continued relevance to the Region and our people during this difficult time in our history, hinges not just on our collective strength and
intelligence alone, but also on our adaptability to the current milieu and our ability to live within the means available and work co-operatively for the good of the Forum and our people even against the very real threat of the pandemic. It is precisely for this reason that I would like to commend the Secretariat for coming up with a solid business continuity plan predicated on technology at a time when our borders are closed by this deadly pandemic. Allow me to also commend you, Hon. Speakers and Hon. Members, for making the transition to technology-based platforms with minimum hassles. I am aware that the various Sub-Committees have been meeting and executing the tasks assigned to them by the EXCO virtually. This demonstrates your commitment to the work and objectives of the Forum and is a bold declaration of your intent to ensure that the Forum is not forced into operational paralysis by the COVID-19 pandemic. Adaptability is about the powerful difference between adapting to cope and adapting to win and it is clear to me that we have adapted to win in our endeavour to advance the objectives of the SADC Parliamentary Forum.

**Hon. Speakers, Hon. Members, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

We meet at a time when our usual patterns of existence have been broken, at a time when our habits have been changed and some forever. As Benjamin Disraeli rightly stated, "Change is inevitable." Change is constant and change is not necessarily bad. Indeed, when patterns are broken, new worlds emerge. As a Forum, we must, therefore, continue to explore innovative ways of making our mark and leaving an indelible legacy on our Region and its people notwithstanding the exigencies of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is for this reason, that I am particularly gratified to hear that, through the Legal Sub-
Committee, we have proactively developed Special Standing Orders for Virtual Sittings and Meetings which this Committee will consider and adopt. Life must go on and the business of the Forum must proceed as we have a sacred mandate to protect and promote the common interests of the people of our region as their elected representatives. We dare not cower in the face of the pandemic for we owe it to our people and to posterity to ensure that the we live up to the commitments we made in the Preamble to our Constitution, namely:

- to promote respect for the rule of law, gender equality and equity, individual rights and freedoms, including the promotion and development of cooperation in the economic field in the SADC region based on the principle of equity and mutual benefit;
- to promote peace, democracy, security and stability on the basis of collective responsibility and supporting the development of permanent conflict resolution mechanisms in the SADC sub-region and strengthening regional solidarity and building a sense of common destiny among the peoples of SADC; and,
- to promote dialogue and cooperation among Member States on socio-economic development issues in order to enhance economic welfare.

Additionally, our Vision as captured in our Strategic Plan, compels us to be, “The flag-bearer of democratisation and socio-economic development in the SADC Region.” We must, therefore, be seen to be at the forefront of initiatives that promote participatory democracy and advance the socio-economic
development of the Region. A flag-bearer leads the way. A flag-bearer holds the torch for others to see through the Cimmerian darkness. A flag-bearer does not follow the mundane path, but goes where there is no path and creates a way. To that end, let me commend our Secretariat for taking the initiative to develop comprehensive Guidelines for SADC National Parliaments to Address the COVID-19 Pandemic. Not only do they provide a framework for the Forum and national Parliaments to continue playing a leading role in consolidating legal and policy frameworks that can assist to mitigate the outbreak in both the short and long term, but they also ensure the continued relevance of Parliaments to the current socio-economic developments. As the people’s elected representatives, we are hard-pressed to be lead the fight from the front, to walk the talk in fighting the coronavirus scourge, and I am pleased to see that we are not shirking from that responsibility. Indeed, as the EXCO we have a fiduciary duty to ensure that the Forum remains attuned to its mandate and remains in touch with the ideals, hopes and aspirations of the people of the Region. In adopting these Guidelines, and judiciously considering several other weighty issues before us on behalf of the Forum, we will be responding to that sacrosanct duty affirmatively.

**Hon. Speakers, Hon. Members, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

As our term draws to a close, we must look back at the work we have done over the past two years and earnestly ask ourselves whether we have done the best we could to advance the objectives of the Forum. I, for one, will emphatically and definitively say, **“Yes we have.”** The Transformation Agenda has gained traction like never before due to our efforts and those before us. This alone, if not anything else, is a succinct confirmation that we have continued to drive the Forum relentlessly towards achieving its
mission. Let me take this opportunity to thank His Excellency, Hon. Speaker Advocate Jacob Francis Mudenda, for spearheading the development of the Transformation Strategy that will continue to guide our lobbying initiatives to Heads of States and Ministers of Foreign Affairs. Allow me, also, regrettably, to bid farewell to one of our own, Hon. Speaker Nicholas Prea, who is retiring from active politics. It is not lost on us that his tireless efforts resulted in the return of Madagascar to the Forum family, which is one of the achievements that this EXCO can unapologetically claim. So yet again I say, “Yes we have.” It is our hope that we will continue to benefit from his wise counsel post-retirement and we pray that he will continue to assist us to lure The Comoros back into the fold from his palatial retirement perch. We wish him every success in his future endeavours.

Allow me to also wish well our two sister nations Seychelles and Tanzania who are currently working towards holding elections in the next two months. May the will of their people be granted.

On this poignant note, I declare this meeting officially open. I look forward to fruitful and mutually beneficial deliberations which will affirm our response to the question whether we have advanced the Forum’s objectives. At the end of it all, I believe we will collectively reiterate that, “Yes, we have.”

I thank you.