SAFE PARLIAMENTARY SPACES

Development of the Regional Anti-Sexual Harassment Policy

(RASHP)

FOUNDATIONAL BASIS OF POLICY

- SADC PF is a regional inter-parliamentary body, operating as an autonomous consultative assembly.
- SADC PF is transitioning into a fully-fledged regional Parliament. This transformation will give citizens of the region a direct voice in regional policy-making and will help standardise a number of laws across the 15 Southern African Nations.

FOUNDATIONAL BASIS OF POLICY

- The core values of the SADC Parliamentary Forum, including equality, inclusiveness, respect, integrity, solidarity, constitutionalism, the rule of law, human dignity, good governance and democratic accountability, provide the foundation for professional, respectful and harassment-free environments for all participants in SADC PF Assemblies and other Forum Activities.

FOUNDATIONAL BASIS OF POLICY

- The legitimacy of Parliament is, therefore, not measured only by the laws it passes, but also by the institutional culture it maintains. A parliament that tolerates sexual harassment, intimidation, victimisation, discrimination or abuse of power within its own precincts weakens the very constitutional values it is established to uphold and on which it is anchored.

FOUNDATIONAL BASIS OF POLICY

Policy Anchor:

- **Constitutionalism**
- **SADC Treaty**
- **SADC Protocol on Gender and Development**
- **SADC Vision 2050 and Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan 2020–2030**
- **SADC Model Law on Gender-Based Violence 2021**
- **AU Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (2025)**

PART 5 OF POLICY- REGIONAL AND GLOBAL VALUES, PRINCIPLES AND COMMITMENTS

PRIVILEGES AND V CULTURAL SENSITIVITIES

- We recognise that National Assemblies are governed by constitutional provisions, Standing Orders, codes of conduct, committee rules, privileges statutes, administrative regulations and internal disciplinary mechanisms. These provisions reflect the constitutional doctrine of parliamentary privilege and the principle of institutional autonomy.

PRIVILEGES AND V CULTURAL SENSITIVITIES

- HOWEVER, Member States, Constitutions recognise national values and principles that include democracy and constitutionalism, human dignity, equity, social justice, equality, non-discrimination, good governance and integrity. These values apply to the interpretation of the Constitution, the enactment and interpretation of law and the development and implementation of State policy.
- Parliamentary privilege exists to protect the independence and effective functioning of Parliament; it does not exist to protect sexual harassment, abuse of power, intimidation, retaliation or conduct that undermines the dignity and safety of persons within the parliamentary environment.

PRIVILEGES AND CULTURAL SENSITIVITIES

- Parliamentary procedure and privilege must, therefore, take into account sexual harassment prevention and accountability. Where conduct implicates parliamentary privilege, the matter should be handled in a manner that respects the constitutional autonomy of Parliament while ensuring that privilege is not misused as a shield for harassment or abuse. This is in line with the detailed guide of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Policy to Prevent and Address Harassment, including Sexual Harassment, at IPU Assemblies and other IPU Events (October 2023).
- **PART- 3 OF POLICY PARLIAMENTARY PRIVILEGE, PROCEDURE AND NATIONAL LAWS**

PRIVILEGES AND CULTURAL SENSITIVITIES

- Across the SADC landscape, culture, tradition and social norms play an important role in shaping community life, leadership, gender relations and institutional behaviour.
- Many cultural values across the region affirm respect, dignity, responsibility, social harmony, protection of the vulnerable and the importance of community.
- Properly understood, these values support a parliamentary culture of mutual respect and ethical conduct.

PRIVILEGES AND CULTURAL SENSITIVITIES

- However, the Policy also recognises that certain traditional, social, economic, cultural and political practices may legitimise, minimise or perpetuate gender-based violence and harassment where they reinforce unequal power relations, silence victims, normalise sexist language, excuse inappropriate conduct by senior persons, discourage reporting, or require women and younger persons to defer to authority even when their dignity has been violated.

PRIVILEGES AND CULTURAL SENSITIVITIES

- RASHP affirms that culture and tradition must be respected only to the extent that they are consistent with constitutionalism, human dignity, equality and non-discrimination.
- No cultural role, parliamentary custom, party practice, social expectation, seniority rule or traditional belief may be invoked to justify sexual harassment, retaliation, victim-blaming, forced informal settlement, silencing of complainants or failure to discipline perpetrators.

PRIVILEGES AND CULTURAL SENSITIVITIES

- Parliamentary institutions must be culturally aware, but they must also be rights-based. The purpose of this Policy is therefore not to reject culture, but to ensure that parliamentary culture evolves in a manner consistent with constitutional democracy and gender equality.

SADC PARLIAMENTARY FORUM

POSITION PAPER

Regional Anti-Sexual Harassment Policy



Submitted to the Executive Committee of the SADC Parliamentary Forum

Ref: SADC PF / RASHP / 2026 / 01 | May 2026 | Phase A Deliverable

www.sadcpf.org | Windhoek, Namibia

Executive Summary

- Harassment, including sexual harassment, is a documented, systemic and harmful phenomenon in parliamentary environments worldwide, including across Africa.
- The SADC PF has a legal, institutional and moral obligation to address it. The RASHP is the mechanism through which the Forum discharges that obligation.
- Seven core policy positions are recommended for the Executive Committee's endorsement, covering: scope, prohibited conduct, reporting architecture, investigation, sanctions, capacity development and legal amendments.
- Seven politically sensitive design questions are addressed directly, with principled and workable positions proposed on each.
- The Executive Committee is asked to affirm these positions so that the zero draft RASHP accurately reflects the Forum's institutional choices.



01 The Problem: Why the RASHP is Needed

The Evidence Cannot Be Ignored

IPU/APU Africa Study 2021 + IPU Global Study 2016

80%

African women MPs experienced psychological violence in parliament

40%

African women MPs were sexually harassed (39% sexual violence)

83%

of incidents on parliamentary premises

65.5%

Women MPs globally subjected to repeated sexist comments

The Cost of Inaction

Reputational Risk

A Forum promoting democracy but lacking an anti-harassment framework undermines its own credibility as a regional standard-setter.

Participation Risk

Harassment deters women from political participation. Several high-profile women leaders left parliament in 2023 citing harassment.

Legal Risk

Without an institutional policy, the Forum cannot address incidents within its framework, creating accountability gaps.

Donor Risk

The Sweden-funded SRHR Project includes gender equality objectives. Failure to deliver a credible RASHP would compromise donor compliance.

02 Seven Core Policy Positions

Policy Positions 1 to 3: Scope, Conduct and Reporting

1

Zero Tolerance and Scope of Application

Applies to all MPs, staff and stakeholders; all in-person, virtual and hybrid Forum Activities. No seniority or cultural background excuses prohibited conduct.

2

Definition of Prohibited Conduct

Both sexual harassment and broader harassment (race, age, disability, religion, political affiliation) are prohibited. Consistent with SADC Gender Protocol Art. 22 and IPU Policy 2023.

3

Dual-Track Reporting Architecture

Informal and formal procedures; 5 reporting channels; 2-year limitation period (IPU-aligned); signed complaints; no anonymous formal complaints; informed consent required.

Policy Positions 4 and 5: Investigation and Sanctions

4

Investigation and Adjudication

Independent Committee of 3 retired judges; mandatory recusal rules including nationality-based recusal; external independent investigators as default (IPU-benchmarked); 60-working-day timeline.

5

Graduated Sanctions Framework

4 levels from formal warning to permanent exclusion; suspension of governance positions at Levels 3 and 4 (IPU-benchmarked); all sanctions imposed by Executive Committee on Committee recommendation.

Policy Positions 6 and 7: Capacity and Amendments

6

Mandatory Capacity Development

Capacity Development Guide is non-optional and integral to the RASHP. Sessions at 2026 Plenary Assembly, 2027, 2028 and biennially thereafter.

7

Legal Amendments Required

Amendments needed to: Forum Constitution; Rules of Procedure; Administrative Rules. Draft texts included in Annexure D of the RASHP (Version 3).



03 Politically Sensitive Issues

Politically Sensitive Questions 1 to 3: Recommended Positions

Can the Forum sanction MPs?	Yes, within institutional competence. Forum regulates its own Activities; findings communicated to home Parliament for further action under national law.
Does cultural diversity prevent a single standard?	No. RASHP is grounded in universal human rights and SADC Protocol. Diversity acknowledged; not used to justify prohibited conduct.
What protects respondents from false complaints?	Signed complaints; right to respond; Committee review; bad-faith complaints may lead to disciplinary action against complainant.

Politically Sensitive Questions 4 to 6: Recommended Positions

Does the RASHP cover social events?	Yes. Applies to social events and receptions held in connection with Forum Activities.
Does it cover virtual/hybrid events?	Yes. All virtual and hybrid Forum Activities are expressly covered, including electronic and digital communications.
Can men make complaints?	Yes. RASHP applies to all Forum participants regardless of sex, gender identity or any other characteristic.

04 Recommendations to the Executive Committee

Recommendations 1 to 4: Executive Committee Action Required

1	ENDORSE the RASHP as a binding institutional instrument to be adopted by the Plenary Assembly
2	AFFIRM the seven core policy positions in Section 5, or indicate any positions requiring modification
3	CONFIRM the nine-Part RASHP architecture as reflected in the draft RASHP (Version 3, Regional Format, 2026)
4	MANDATE the Legal Sub-Committee to review draft amendments in Annexure D and report within 60 days

Recommendations 5 to 7: Executive Committee Action Required

5	AUTHORISE the Secretary General to facilitate Phase B stakeholder consultations (Working Days 6-10)
6	CONFIRM dates for stakeholder dissemination meetings at the 2026 Plenary Assembly
7	NOTE that Capacity Development Sessions for 2027 and 2028 will be scheduled with 30 days notice

SADC PARLIAMENTARY FORUM

An historic opportunity.

The Forum can set a regional standard for safe, dignified and respectful engagement.



Position Paper | Submitted to the Executive Committee | May 2026

SADC PF / RASHP / 2026 / 01 | www.sadcpf.org

SADC PARLIAMENTARY FORUM



Regional Anti-Sexual Harassment Policy

RASHP, 2026

Adopted by the Plenary Assembly

www.sadcpf.org | Windhoek, Namibia

Presentation Outline

01 Background and Context

02 Legal and Normative Foundation

03 Prohibited Conduct

04 Reporting Architecture

05 Investigation and Sanctions

06 Capacity Development

07 Next Steps

01 Background and Context

The SADC PF Context

The Forum

- 15 Member Parliaments across Southern Africa
- Independent organ of SADC under Article 9(2) of the SADC Treaty
- Promotes democracy, parliamentarism and regional dialogue
- Governed by Strategic Plan 2024-2028
- Funded activities include SRHR, HIV and AIDS Governance Project (Sweden, 2023-2026)

The Risk

- Intensive inter-parliamentary gatherings create heightened risk conditions
- Power imbalances across 15 Member Parliaments
- Absence of an institutional anti-harassment framework
- Abuse goes unreported without safe reporting mechanisms
- Harassment deters women from political participation

02 Legal and Normative Foundation

Legal and Normative Foundation

SADC Treaty	Art. 6(2): non-discrimination on grounds of sex or gender
SADC Gender Protocol	Art. 22: States must prevent and address sexual harassment
CEDAW (1979)	GR 19 and 35: sexual harassment constitutes gender-based discrimination
Banjul Charter (1981)	Arts. 2 and 5: non-discrimination and prohibition of degrading treatment

Legal and Normative Foundation

Beijing PfA (1995)	Strategic Objective I.1: eliminate violence against women
SADC PF Strategic Plan	2024-2028: respect for one another as a core guiding principle
IPU Policy (2023)	Benchmark for inter-parliamentary anti-harassment frameworks

03 Prohibited Conduct

Scope and Prohibited Conduct

Who is covered

- All MPs of 15 Member Parliaments
- Secretariat and parliamentary staff
- Observers, experts, diplomats and collaborating partners
- All in-person, virtual and hybrid Forum Activities

Forms of Prohibited Conduct

Physical	Unwanted touching, assault	**Verbal**	Sexual comments, threats, slurs
Non-verbal	Leering, suggestive gestures	**Electronic**	Messages, images, digital harassment
Psychological	Coercion, intimidation, quid pro quo	**Broader**	Race, age, disability, religion-based harassment



04 Reporting Architecture

Dual-Track Reporting Architecture

INFORMAL PROCEDURE

For less severe incidents where a formal complaint is not yet desired

- Direct approach with Focal Point support
- Third-party facilitation option
- Entirely voluntary
- Failure does not preclude formal complaint
- Not available for sexual assault

FORMAL PROCEDURE

Signed, dated complaint
Informed consent required
No anonymous complaints

- 5 reporting channels available
- 2-year limitation period (IPU-aligned)
- Written acknowledgement within 5 working days
- External independent investigators appointed
- 60-working-day investigation timeline

Five Reporting Channels

1	**Designated Focal Point**	Trained Secretariat staff member, present at all Forum Activities including virtual events
2	**Secretary General**	Direct submission to info@sadcpf.org or +264 61 287 0000
3	**Encrypted Digital Portal**	Confidential online portal accessible to all Forum participants
4	**Independent Committee**	Direct submission to the Committee of Retired Judges once constituted
5	**Emergency Channel**	Any Secretariat staff or senior official for immediate safety risks



05 Investigation and Sanctions

Independent Committee of Retired Judges

The cornerstone of the RASHP's credibility and impartiality

Composition

3 retired judges from SADC Member States; minimum 1 female and 1 male; appointed by the Plenary Assembly

Independence

No connection to Forum governance; recusal rules including nationality-based recusal (IPU-benchmarked)

External Investigators

External independent investigators appointed as default for all formal investigations

Tenure

2-year terms, renewable once; own rules of procedure approved by Executive Committee

Independent Committee of Retired Judges

Timeline

Investigations completed within 60 working days; interim protective measures available from Secretary General

Rights of Parties

Respondent informed of allegations; right to respond; both parties receive written outcome

Graduated Sanctions Framework

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Formal Warning	**Restricted Participation**	**Suspension**	**Permanent Exclusion**
Remedial training and counselling First-time or less severe violations	Temporary suspension from Forum Activities Public censure; completion of full programme	Up to 2 years; governance position suspended Notification to home Parliament	Permanent exclusion and governance bar Notification to Parliament and national authorities

All sanctions recommended by the Independent Committee and imposed by the Executive Committee

06 Capacity Development

Mandatory Capacity Development Guide

An integral, non-optional part of the RASHP, not a separate voluntary document

Ch. 1	Purpose and Objectives
Ch. 2	Understanding Harassment
Ch. 3	Obligations in Practice
Ch. 4	How to Report: Step by Step
Ch. 5	Supporting Colleagues
Ch. 6	Scenario-Based Training
Ch. 7	Resources and Contacts

Sessions: 2026 Plenary Assembly | 2027 | 2028 | Biennially thereafter

07 Next Steps

Next Steps for Adoption and Implementation

90 days	Constitute the Independent Committee of Retired Judges
60 days	Legal Sub-Committee to review draft amendments to Constitution, Rules of Procedure and Administrative Rules
60 days	Secretariat to publish operational guidelines for Articles 11, 12, 13 and 21
2026	Plenary Assembly to formally adopt the RASHP and mandate legal amendments

Next Steps for Adoption and Implementation

2026	Capacity Development Sessions at Plenary Assembly
2027-28	Annual Capacity Development Sessions
Biennial	Monitoring Body to report to Plenary Assembly on implementation

Zero Tolerance.

Dignity for Every Forum Participant.



SADC Parliamentary Forum | Regional Anti-Sexual Harassment Policy (RASHP), 2026

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