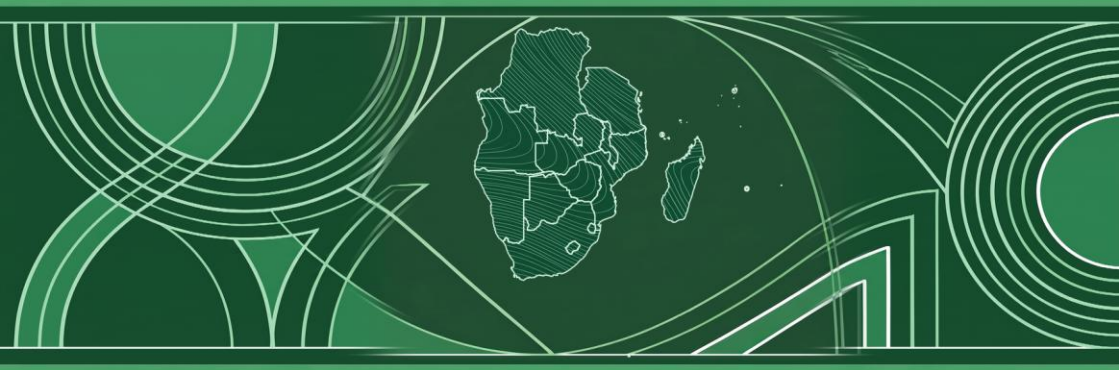
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SADC
Parliamentary Forum
Forum Parlementaire
Forum Parlamentar

REGIONAL ANTI-SEXUAL HARASSMENT POLICY (RASHP)

Including Mandatory Capacity Development Guide and Amendments to Constitutional and Institutional Documents

2026



SADC Forum House | Parliament Gardens | Windhoek, Namibia
www.sadcpf.org | info@sadcpf.org | +264 61 287 0000



SADC Parliamentary Forum

SADC Forum House
Parliament Gardens
Windhoek, Namibia

www.sadcpf.org
info@sadcpf.org
+264 61 287 0000

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PREAMBLE

RECALLING the universal recognition of human dignity as the foundation of all rights and freedoms, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and affirmed by the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Banjul Charter, 1981);

REAFFIRMING the commitment of SADC Member States to gender equality and the elimination of all forms of discrimination, as reflected in the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development (2008, as amended 2016), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979), and the Beijing Platform for Action (1995);

ACKNOWLEDGING the growing body of research and international parliamentary practice confirming that Members of Parliament, in their diversity, are not immune to sexual harassment and other forms of harassment in their vocational interactions, as documented by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), whose Policy to Prevent and Address Harassment, including Sexual Harassment, at IPU Assemblies and other IPU Events (October 2023) has served as a key comparative benchmark in the development of this Policy, together with frameworks of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, the European Parliament and the House of Commons;

RECOGNISING that the Forum's Strategic Plan (2024-2028) enshrines respect for one another, grounded in fundamental freedoms, as a core institutional principle, and that this principle

demands concrete, enforceable protection from harassment and sexual harassment for all who participate in Forum Activities;

CONSCIOUS of the unique and sensitive political environment in which Parliamentarians operate, including the diversity of parliamentary traditions, legal systems, cultural backgrounds and power dynamics across the 15 SADC Member Parliaments, and the heightened risks of harassment inherent in intensive inter-parliamentary gatherings whether in-person, virtual or hybrid such as Standing Committee meetings, Joint Sessions and Plenary Assemblies;

DETERMINED to give practical and institutional effect to a zero-tolerance framework for harassment, including sexual harassment, in all interactions conducted under the auspices of the Forum, and to ensure that the Forum's activities are characterized by dignity, respect and professional integrity at all times;

COMMITTED to providing accessible, confidential and effective reporting and adjudication mechanisms including both informal and formal resolution options that protect complainants from retaliation, uphold the rights of respondents to a fair process, and deliver genuine accountability where harassment is established;

HAVING REGARD to the Sweden-funded SRHR, HIV and AIDS Governance Project (2023-2026) and the Forum's obligations thereunder in respect of gender equality, inclusion and the promotion of safe parliamentary environments;

NOW, THEREFORE, **the SADC Parliamentary Forum** hereby adopts this Regional Anti-Sexual Harassment Policy (RASHP), which shall constitute a binding instrument of the Forum,

enforceable in respect of all Members SADC PF, Secretariat staff, Member Parliament staff and other stakeholders who interact under the Forum's auspices, in accordance with the provisions set out herein.

ADOPTED BY THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY OF THE SADC PARLIAMENTARY FORUM, THIS..... DAY OF .....2026.

PART I-FOUNDATIONAL CONTEXT

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The SADC Parliamentary Forum (hereinafter "the SADC PF"), is established pursuant to Article 9(2) of the Treaty of the Southern African Development Community, and is composed of 15 Member Parliaments. 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.[1]

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.

Protagonists in democracy and governance state that Parliaments occupy a central place in constitutional democracy. Parliaments are the pillar institutions through which the sovereign will of the people is represented, laws are enacted, public resources are authorised, executive action is scrutinized and national values are translated into governance. Within the SADC, the legitimacy of

[1] Amendment of the SADC Treaty in 2024, legally establishing the SADC Parliament as a formal institution of SADC

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.

Policy Anchor - Constitutionalism

This Policy is anchored in constitutionalism: the rule of law, human rights, human dignity, equality, non-discrimination, democratic accountability and good governance. Constitutionalism requires that public power be exercised lawfully, fairly, rationally and consistently with fundamental rights. It also requires that no person, including elected representatives, presiding officers, senior parliamentary officials, political office-holders, staff members, consultants, interns, visitors or any other person operating within the parliamentary environment, is above institutional accountability. The rule of law requires clear standards of conduct, accessible reporting mechanisms, impartial procedures, protection from retaliation, reasoned decision-making and proportionate sanctions. In the context of sexual harassment, this means that complaints must not be handled informally, politically or selectively in a manner that protects status, seniority or party affiliation at the expense of dignity, safety and justice.

SADC Treaty

The SADC Treaty provides a strong regional anchor for the SADC PF RASHP. Article 4 of the Treaty requires SADC and its Member States to act in accordance with principles that include human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The Treaty also prohibits

discrimination by SADC and Member States on grounds that include gender, religion, political views, race, ethnic origin, culture, ill-health and disability. These provisions are directly relevant to this RASHP because sexual harassment is both a form of gender-based misconduct and an abuse of dignity, equality and institutional power. A policy of this nature is therefore not merely an internal administrative document. It is part of the broader SADC commitment to democratic governance, human rights and accountable public institutions.

SADC Protocol on Gender and Development

The SADC Protocol on Gender and Development defines sexual harassment broadly as any unwelcome sexual advance, request for sexual favour, verbal or physical conduct or gesture of a sexual nature, or any other behaviour of a sexual nature that might reasonably be expected or perceived to cause offence or humiliation, whether or not it arises out of unequal power relations. This definition is particularly important in parliamentary institutions, where unequal power relations may exist between Members of Parliament (women and men) and staff, senior and junior officials, committee leadership and committee staff, party whips and backbenchers, supervisors and interns, or politically influential persons and visitors to Parliament.

The SADC Protocol further requires State Parties to enact legislative provisions and adopt and implement policies, strategies and programmes which define and prohibit sexual harassment in all spheres, and to provide deterrent sanctions for perpetrators. It also requires equal representation of women and men in adjudicating bodies hearing sexual harassment cases. This RASHP,

therefore, gives institutional effect to the regional expectation that sexual harassment must be clearly defined, expressly prohibited, procedurally addressed and subjected to meaningful consequences.

SADC Vision 2050 and Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan 2020–2030

This RASHP is also consistent with SADC's Vision 2050 and the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan 2020–2030. SADC Vision 2050 seeks a peaceful, inclusive, competitive, middle-to high-income industrialised region where citizens enjoy sustainable economic well-being, justice and freedom. This RASHP identifies Peace, Security and Good Governance as the foundation of regional integration and recognises gender as a cross-cutting issue. A safe and harassment-free parliamentary environment is therefore part of the institutional infrastructure required for justice, freedom, democratic participation and inclusive governance in the region.

SADC Model Law on Gender-Based Violence 2021

A primary aim of the SADC Model Law on Gender-Based Violence is to guide Member States towards developing effective policies and laws that address gender-based violence and eliminate it from the Southern African region.[2] The Model law defines and deals with GBV extensively, including sexual harassment, and is therefore a great reference Model Law to assist SADC PF in dealing consistently with the vexing issue of sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is defined, in the Model law, as any unwelcome

[2] Adopted by the 50th Plenary Assembly

sexual advance, request for sexual favour, verbal, display of images, or physical conduct or gesture of a sexual nature, or any other behaviour of a sexual nature that might reasonably be expected or be perceived to cause offence or humiliation to another, whether or not such sexual advance or request arises out of unequal power relations. The Model Law proclaims that GBV is an affront to Human rights.

The Model Law deals with adequate measures, strategies, programmes and interventions to deal with GBV, including adequate capacity building of critical role players and stakeholders for effective and sustainable prevention, rehabilitative, monitoring and management of GBV cases. Similarly, for effective and efficacious handling of sexual harassment cases this Policy establishes procedural systems to ensure complaints and grievances are dealt with in a manner espoused in the GBV Model Law. section 10 of the Model Law specifically deals with the right to Fair Administration and provides that a person is entitled to administrative action that is expeditious, lawful, reasonable and procedurally fair.

The GBV Model Law in section 36 lays down sound evidentiary rules and procedures for dealing with GBV cases which may be emulated in this Policy when dealing with cases of sexual harassment. Of value to the RASHP is section 54 which provides for the core principles underlying grievances, complaints and appeals for GBV cases, and section 55 which provides for mandatory requirements for grievances, complaints and appeals policy, which will be reproduced in this Policy.

The newly adopted AU Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (2025) also defines violence against women broadly, including verbal abuse as well as technology-facilitated violence in the cyberspace, thus in line with the SADC Model Law on GBV.

World of Work

At the international parliamentary level, the Inter-Parliamentary Union has recognised that parliaments must transform themselves into gender-sensitive environments free from sexism, harassment and abuse. This is particularly important because Parliament is not an ordinary workplace. It is a political, constitutional and public institution in which workplace relations, party structures, electoral mandates, public visibility, media scrutiny, constituency responsibilities, committee work and hierarchical authority intersect. The same conduct may therefore have multiple dimensions: employment misconduct, ethical misconduct, abuse of office, breach of parliamentary decorum, gender-based violence, discrimination and, in serious cases, criminal conduct.

Sexual harassment occurs within the broader “world of work”. The International Labour Organization’s Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 recognises the right of everyone to a world of work free from violence and harassment, including gender-based violence and harassment. Parliamentary institutions should therefore treat sexual harassment not as a private or interpersonal matter, but as a workplace safety, equality, institutional governance and human rights concern.

Culture, Tradition and Social Norms in SADC Landscape

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. However, this 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.

The SADC Protocol on Gender and Development expressly requires State Parties to take measures, including legislation where appropriate, to discourage traditional norms and social, economic, cultural and political practices that legitimise and exacerbate the persistence and tolerance of gender-based violence. It also requires gender sensitisation and public awareness programmes aimed at changing behaviour and eradicating gender-based violence. This is central to a parliamentary sexual harassment policy because the elimination of harassment requires more than a complaints mechanism. It requires cultural transformation within Parliament itself.

The SADC Gender Policy similarly recognises that gender inequalities in the region are sustained by factors such as unequal power relations, patriarchal attitudes, entrenched discriminatory cultural norms, religious and social norms, limited participation of

women in decision-making, weak enforcement mechanisms, limited awareness of constitutional and legal rights and plural legal systems that may inadequately reinforce women's human rights. It also identifies gender equality as a fundamental human right and an integral part of regional integration, economic growth and social development.

Accordingly, this 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. 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.

A Governance Issue

Sexual harassment must also be understood as a governance issue. The SADC PF is a regional inter-parliamentary body composed of Members of Parliament from SADC Member States' National parliaments. It supports regional integration through parliamentary involvement and rendering best practices in the role of parliaments. Its objectives include the promotion of human rights, gender equality, good governance, democracy and transparency. A sexual harassment policy for SADC PF is, therefore, consistent with its institutional mandate, as it

strengthens parliamentary integrity, promotes gender-responsive governance and ensures that parliamentary spaces do not reproduce the very inequalities that parliaments are expected to address through representativeness and oversight.

Sexual Harassment, Cyber Space and Cybercrime

The rapid development of information and communication technology has transformed the way people interact, communicate and work. Social media platforms, online forums, messaging applications, and virtual communities have created new opportunities for global communication. However, these technological advancements have also increased incidents of sexual harassment in cyberspace.

Sexual harassment in cyberspace refers to unwelcome sexual behavior conducted through digital platforms or electronic communication channels. It includes cyberstalking, sending explicit messages or images, online bullying, sexual intimidation, revenge pornography, unwanted sexual advances, and harassment through social media or emails. These acts violate personal dignity, privacy, and human rights, often causing severe emotional, psychological, and social harm to victims.

The anonymity and accessibility provided by the internet make cyberspace a favorable environment for offenders. Victims, especially women, are increasingly exposed to online sexual abuse and exploitation. As digital communication expands, online harassment cases continue to increase globally. Social networking platforms and anonymous online identities allow perpetrators to target victims with little fear of immediate punishment.

Many individuals experience harassment through offensive comments, inappropriate images, threats, blackmail, and persistent online stalking. In some cases, victims suffer reputational damage, psychological distress, fear, humiliation, and social isolation emotional trauma, depression and anxiety. Despite laws and regulations designed to protect internet users, cyber sexual harassment remains a growing concern due to inadequate enforcement, lack of awareness, and rapid technological advancement.

Sexual harassment in cyberspace has become a major social and legal problem affecting internet users worldwide. The anonymity of online platforms often protects offenders and complicates investigations. Additionally, many victims fail to report incidents due to fear, shame, or lack of confidence in legal systems. As a result, online sexual harassment continues to threaten digital safety and human dignity.

Social media and anonymous online platforms contribute significantly to sexual harassment in cyberspace. Lack of digital literacy and weak enforcement of cyber laws encourage offenders. Strong cybersecurity policies, public awareness, and strict enforcement by SADC PF can reduce or stop online sexual harassment of Parliamentarians, staff and other stakeholders.

Sexual harassment in cyberspace is a growing challenge in the digital world. Although technology has improved communication and connectivity, it has also created opportunities for online abuse and exploitation. Combating cyber sexual harassment requires that SADF PF cooperates closely with National Governments and internet service providers, law enforcement agencies, and users

themselves. Effective policies, laws, awareness campaigns, digital education, and responsible online behavior are essential in creating a safer and more respectful cyberspace for all users.

On the other hand, cybercrime involves illegal activities carried out through computers, networks, or digital devices, including hacking, phishing, online fraud, cyberbullying, and unauthorized access to information systems. The intersection between sexual harassment and cybercrime has become more evident due to social media, messaging applications, and anonymous online platforms that facilitate digital abuse.

While technology has enhanced communication and business operations, it has also increased opportunities for cyber offenders and perpetrators of online harassment. Many victims, particularly women, including parliamentarians, may experience online sexual exploitation, cyberbullying, revenge pornography, and stalking, which must be effectively dealt with.

Despite existing legal frameworks in SADC countries and awareness campaigns, incidents of sexual harassment and cybercrime continue to rise. Many cases go unreported due to fear, stigma, or lack of confidence in legal systems. Sexual harassment and cybercrime remain serious challenges in the work place. The RASHP should deal with cybercrime so as to bring out the legal implications and preventive measures related to sexual harassment.

Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)- Policy to Prevent and Address Harassment, including Sexual Harassment, at IPU Assemblies

Member States acknowledge the growing body of research and international parliamentary practice confirming that Member States parliaments, in their diversity, are not immune to sexual harassment and other forms of harassment in their vocational interactions, as documented by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), whose Policy to Prevent and Address Harassment, including Sexual Harassment, at IPU Assemblies and other IPU Events (October 2023) has served as a key comparative benchmark in the development of this Policy, together with frameworks of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, the European Parliament and the House of Commons.

Procedural Character of SADC Member States' Parliaments

This RASHP also recognises the special procedural character of SADC Member States' Parliaments. National Assemblies are governed by constitutional provisions, Standing Orders, codes of conduct, committee rules, privileges statutes, administrative regulations and internal disciplinary mechanisms. In some Member States, for example, their 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.

The Constitutions, written laws and Standing Orders of most Member States further provide that a Member of Parliament has freedom of speech and debate in the National Assembly and that such freedom shall not be ousted or questioned in a court or

tribunal. They also provide that the National Assembly shall regulate its own procedure and make Standing Orders for the conduct of its business. These provisions reflect the constitutional doctrine of parliamentary privilege and the principle of institutional autonomy. However, 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.

The National Assembly powers and privileges laws generally declare and define the powers, privileges and immunities of the National Assembly and its members and officers, secures freedom of speech in the National Assembly and regulates admittance to the precincts of the Assembly. The Act recognises freedom of speech and debate, immunity for words spoken or written in parliamentary proceedings and the power of the Assembly to inquire into acts or omissions amounting to contempt of Parliament or contraventions of Standing Orders and parliamentary practice.

For purposes of this RASHP, parliamentary procedure and privilege must, therefore, take into account sexual harassment prevention and accountability. Conduct occurring during sittings, committee meetings, caucus engagements, parliamentary travel, regional meetings, training programmes, constituency-related parliamentary work, official events, offices, corridors, chambers, committee rooms, parliamentary accommodation, digital platforms or other spaces connected to parliamentary work must be capable of being addressed through appropriate procedures.

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).

This RASHP, therefore, establishes a clear institutional framework for preventing, reporting, investigating and resolving sexual harassment within SADC PF. It applies to Members of Parliament, presiding officers, parliamentary staff, committee staff, political party officials operating within SADC PF, interns, volunteers, consultants, contractors, security personnel, media personnel, visitors, witnesses, members of the public and any other persons who interact with SADC PF in an official or parliamentary-related capacity. Its purpose is to ensure that all persons who enter, work in, appear before or participate in SADC PF activities and parliamentary processes are treated with dignity, respect and equality.

Zero-Tolerance to Sexual Harassment

The RASHP is founded on a zero-tolerance approach to sexual harassment. Zero tolerance does not mean the absence of due process. Rather, it means that every allegation must be taken seriously, every complainant must be protected from retaliation, every respondent must be afforded fair procedure, every matter must be handled confidentially and impartially, and every substantiated breach must attract appropriate corrective, disciplinary, administrative or legal consequences. This approach

is necessary to preserve public trust in SADC PF, protect its integrity and ensure that parliamentarians, staff and other stakeholders uphold the constitutional values they are entrusted to defend.

1.2 VISION STATEMENT

To ensure that SADC PF is a safe, inclusive, gender-responsive, ethical and constitutionally grounded institution, where every person participates in parliamentary life free from sexual harassment, discrimination, retaliation and abuse of power, and where parliamentary culture reflects human dignity, equality, democracy and the rule of law.

1.3 MISSION STATEMENT

To provide a clear, enforceable and survivor-sensitive framework for the prevention, reporting, investigation and resolution of sexual harassment within SADC PF, while safeguarding due process, parliamentary procedure and privilege, promoting institutional accountability, transforming harmful cultural and gender norms, strengthening public trust and advancing constitutionalism, gender equality, human rights and good governance in SADC PF and across the SADC parliamentary landscape.

1.4 VALUES

The RASHP is grounded in the following core values:

- **Zero Tolerance**: An unambiguous commitment that sexual harassment in any form is prohibited and will be addressed through established procedures.

- **Dignity and Respect**: Affirmation of the fundamental right of every SADC PF participant to be treated with dignity and respect, consistent with the SADC PF's guiding principles.
- **Confidentiality**: Robust protections for the confidentiality of complainants, witnesses and respondents at all stages of the reporting and investigation process.
- **Accountability**: Clear lines of institutional responsibility for implementation, monitoring and enforcement of this RASHP.
- **Non-Retaliation**: Explicit prohibition of any retaliation against individuals who report, witness, or participate in proceedings under this RASHP.
- **Cultural Sensitivity**: Recognition of the diverse cultural contexts of the SADC PF's 15 Member Parliaments, whilst maintaining universal standards of human rights and dignity.

PART 2-LEGAL AUTHORITY, POLICY STATUS AND INTERPRETATION

2.1 This Policy prevents and addresses sexual harassment, at SADC PF Assemblies, activities and other SADC PF events. It applies as a binding institutional policy of the SADC PF upon its adoption by the Plenary Assembly or on such other date as the Plenary Assembly may determine.

2.2 This Policy derives its legal and institutional authority from the SADC Treaty, the Constitution of the SADC Parliamentary Forum, the SADC PF's Rules of Procedure, the SADC PF 's Administrative Rules, applicable host country arrangements and relevant regional and international human rights and parliamentary standards. Where necessary, the SADC PF shall align its statutory and administrative instruments to give full effect to this Policy.

2.3 This Policy shall be interpreted purposively and consistently with the principles of human dignity, equality, non-discrimination, constitutionalism, the rule of law, democratic accountability, fairness, confidentiality, informed consent, survivor-sensitive practice and zero tolerance of retaliation.

2.4 This Policy is designed as a practical guide as well as a binding standard. It, therefore, combines the concise structure of a parliamentary anti-harassment guide with additional SADC PF institutional provisions on reporting channels, independent adjudication, external investigation,

capacity development, sanctions, monitoring, legal alignment and annexures for operational use.

2.5 Nothing in this Policy shall be construed as limiting the jurisdiction of National Assemblies or national competent authorities, the application of National criminal or civil law, or the authority of a Member Parliament to take disciplinary, ethical or administrative action towards its own members within its own constitutional and procedural framework.

PART 3-PARLIAMENTARY PRIVILEGE, PROCEDURE AND NATIONAL LAWS

3.1 The SADC PF recognises that parliaments operate within distinctive constitutional and procedural environments. National Assemblies and Member Parliaments are governed by constitutional provisions, Standing Orders, codes of conduct, privileges legislation, committee rules, administrative regulations and internal disciplinary mechanisms.

3.2 Parliamentary privilege exists to protect the independence and effective functioning of Parliament. It does not exist to protect harassment, sexual harassment, intimidation, retaliation, abuse of power, victim-blaming or conduct that undermines the dignity and safety of persons within the parliamentary environment.

3.3 Where a complaint arises in a setting connected to SADC PF Activities, including a sitting, committee meeting, caucus engagement, mission, training, reception, travel, accommodation, digital platform or informal interaction linked to official participation, the matter shall be handled in a manner that respects parliamentary autonomy while ensuring that privilege is not misused as a shield for misconduct.

3.4 Where the respondent is a Member of Parliament or a person subject to the authority of a Member Parliament, the Forum may impose measures within its own competence and may

formally communicate findings, recommendations or reports to the relevant National Parliament, employer, delegation, disciplinary body or competent authority for appropriate follow-up action.

PART 4-PURPOSE OF POLICY

The purpose of this RASHP is to reiterate the SADC PF's commitment to providing an enabling environment for Plenary Assemblies, SADC PF Activities where everyone can participate in an inclusive, respectful and safe environment, free from harassment, including sexual harassment, intimidation, victimisation, discrimination, retaliation and abuse of power. Members of Parliament and other Participants are expected to conduct themselves with professionalism, responsibility, integrity and respect for human dignity. In this respect the Policy:

4.1 recognises that the SADC PF is not an ordinary workplace. It is a constitutional, political and public institution in which party structures, public visibility, committee work, staff reporting lines, protocol, travel, social functions and hierarchical authority intersect. Sexual Harassment in such a setting may amount to workplace misconduct, ethical misconduct, abuse of office, gender-based violence, discrimination, breach of parliamentary decorum and, in serious cases, criminal conduct;

4.2 prevents sexual harassment from occurring at SADC PF Plenary Assemblies and other SADC PF Activities and confidential reporting channels, to ensure fair, prompt and impartial procedures; protect persons from retaliation; and, where sexual harassment is established, to ensure accountability through appropriate corrective, disciplinary, administrative or legal consequences; and

4.3 gives practical institutional effect to regional and international commitments concerning human rights, democracy, the rule of law, equality, non-discrimination, gender equality, gender-based violence prevention, safe work environments and gender-responsive parliamentary institutions.

PART 5-REGIONAL AND GLOBAL VALUES, PRINCIPLES AND COMMITMENTS

This RASHP affirms and upholds the values, principles, commitments and obligations in related regional and international treaties and other SADC PF adopted instruments and documents, as elucidated below:

5.1 **COMMITMENT** to the Africa Platform of Action (1994); the Beijing Declaration and its Platform for Action (1995); and United Nations Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (2000); and resolved, through the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development (1997) and its Addendum on the Prevention and Eradication of Violence Against Women and Children (1998), to ensure the elimination of all gender inequalities in the SADC Region and the promotion of the full and equal enjoyment of human rights, the principles enunciated in the SADC Model Law on GBV (2021) and the AU Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (2025);

5.2 **UNIVERSAL RECOGNITION** of human dignity as the foundation of all rights and freedoms, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and affirmed by the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Banjul Charter, 1981);

5.3 **GENDER EQUALITY** and the elimination of all forms of discrimination, as reflected in the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development (2008, as amended 2016), the Convention on

the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979), and the Beijing Platform for Action (1995);

5.4 **RESPECT FOR ONE ANOTHER**, grounded in fundamental freedoms, as a core institutional principle, and that this principle demands concrete, enforceable protection from harassment and sexual harassment for all who participate in SADC PF activities;

5.5 **RESPECT FOR THE SOVEREIGN**, unique and sensitive political environment in which Parliamentarians operate, including the diversity of parliamentary traditions, legal systems, cultural backgrounds and power dynamics across the 15 SADC Member Parliaments, and the heightened risks of harassment inherent in intensive inter-parliamentary gatherings whether in-person, virtual or hybrid such as Standing Committee meetings, Joint Sessions and Plenary Assemblies;

5.6 **ENSURING** that the SADC PF's activities are characterized by dignity, respect and professional integrity at all times, as expounded in the SADC Treaty;

5.7 **PROVIDING ACCESSIBLE**, confidential and effective reporting and adjudication mechanisms including both informal and formal resolution options that protect complainants from retaliation, uphold the rights of respondents to a fair process, and deliver genuine accountability where harassment is established, in accordance with the SADC PF Model Law on Gender Based Violence, 2021; and

5.8 **RESPECT** for gender equality, inclusion and the promotion of safe parliamentary environments.

CHAPTER 1-PRELIMINARY PROVISIONS

Article 1: Title and Commencement

1.1. This Policy shall be known and cited as the SADC Parliamentary Forum Regional Anti-Sexual Harassment Policy, 2026 (RASHP).

1.2. This Policy shall come into force on the date of its adoption by the Plenary Assembly of the Forum, or such date as may be fixed by the Plenary Assembly.

Article 2: Definitions

For the purposes of this Policy, the following terms shall bear the meanings assigned to them herein:

Alleged Perpetrator	Any person whose conduct constitutes possible harassment or sexual harassment under this Policy, if established through the applicable procedures.
Capacity Development Guide	The mandatory training and awareness guide forming Part IX of this Policy.
Committee	The Independent Committee of Retired Judges established under Article 17 of this Policy.
Complainant	Any person who submits a complaint under this Policy, whether on his or her own behalf or on behalf of another, with the express consent of the person affected.

Forum	The SADC Parliamentary Forum, an independent organ of the Southern African Development Community composed of 15 Member Parliaments.
Forum Activities	All meetings, sessions, events, missions and related activities conducted under the auspices of the Forum, including in-person, virtual or hybrid Standing Committee meetings, Joint Sessions, Plenary Assemblies, workshops, seminars, field visits, receptions and capacity development sessions, wherever they take place.
Harassment	Any improper or unwelcome conduct, whether by technology-facilitated means or otherwise, that might reasonably be expected or be perceived to cause offence or humiliation to another person, including conduct based on gender, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, physical ability, physical appearance, ethnicity, race, national origin, political affiliation, age, religion or any other ground[3].
MP / Member of Parliament	An elected or a designated member of a Member Parliament of the Forum who participates in Forum Activities.

[3] Drawn from the UN Code of Conduct to prevent harassment, including sexual harassment, at UN system events, adopted as the definition used by the IPU.

Participant	A person who participates in or is present at Forum Activities in an official capacity, including Member of Parliament, Secretariat staff, staff of Member Parliaments, invited experts, observers, diplomatic mission representatives and representatives of collaborating partners.
Psychological Violence	Any act or pattern of conduct that causes or is reasonably likely to cause psychological harm, including intimidation, humiliation, threats, coercive control, stalking, and emotional manipulation.
Respondent	A person against whom a complaint has been made under this Policy.
Secretariat	The Secretariat of the SADC Parliamentary Forum, based in Windhoek, Namibia.
Secretary General	The Secretary General of the SADC Parliamentary Forum, or a duly designated representative.
Sexist Remark	Any oral, written or gestural communication that demeans, stereotypes or discriminates against a person on the basis of their sex, gender identity, gender expression or sexual orientation.
Sexual Harassment	Any unwanted conduct of a sexual nature, whether physical, verbal, non-verbal, written or electronic/digital, that has the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, or of creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment, including quid pro quo harassment.

Speaker / Presiding Officer	The Speaker, Deputy Speaker or equivalent presiding officer of a Member Parliament of the Forum.
Stakeholder	Has the same meaning as Participant.
Victim / Survivor	A person, or persons, towards whom conduct constituting possible harassment or sexual harassment has been directed.
Witness	A person who detains information regarding harassment or sexual harassment under the Policy and provides information or testimony in the course of an investigation under this Policy.
Zero Tolerance	The Forum's unequivocal commitment that harassment in any form shall not be condoned, excused, minimised or ignored, and that every substantiated complaint shall be addressed through the procedures established in this Policy.

Article 3: Scope of Application

3.1. This Policy applies to all MPs, Secretariat staff, Member Parliament staff and Stakeholders who participate in or attend Forum Activities, including members of diplomatic missions, experts, advisers, consultants, invitees, and employees of host parliaments or outside companies servicing Forum events.

3.2. This Policy applies to conduct occurring:

3.2.1 during all Forum Activities, whether in-person, virtual or hybrid, regardless of the location in which such activities are held;

3.2.2 in any communication or interaction that occurs in the context of or in direct connection to Forum Activities, including electronic and digital communications; and

3.2.3 in any setting where individuals are present by reason of their participation in Forum Activities, including social events and receptions hosted in connection with official Forum programmes.

3.3. This Policy applies irrespective of the sex, gender identity, seniority, rank, nationality or parliamentary affiliation of the parties concerned.

3.4. This Policy supplements, and does not affect, the application of other relevant policies, regulations, rules and laws, including the Forum's Constitution, Rules of Procedure, Administrative Rules, and any applicable host country agreements or national laws.

3.5. Nothing in this Policy shall be construed as limiting the jurisdiction of competent National authorities to address conduct that constitutes a criminal offence or civil wrong under the applicable National law of any SADC Member State.

Article 4: Guiding Principles

This Policy shall be interpreted and applied in accordance with the following principles:

Principle	Description
Zero Tolerance	Harassment and sexual harassment in any form are absolutely prohibited. No seniority, political status or cultural background shall excuse or mitigate prohibited conduct.
Dignity and Respect	Every Participant has the right to engage in Forum Activities in an environment free from harassment, intimidation and degradation.
Non-Discrimination	This Policy applies equally to all Forum Participants without distinction on any ground including sex, gender, age, disability, nationality, race, religion or political affiliation.
Confidentiality	The identities of Complainants, Witnesses and Respondents shall be protected at all stages of the complaint and investigation process, to the maximum extent permitted by the requirements of procedural fairness.
Non-Retaliation	A person who makes a complaint in good faith, or who participates in an investigation under this Policy, shall not be subjected to retaliation of any kind.
Informed Consent	A formal investigation shall only be initiated with the informed consent of the Victim/Survivor, save in exceptional circumstances involving safety risks to others.

Principle	Description
Fairness and Due Process	Every Respondent has the right to be informed of the allegations against them, to be heard, and to have their case determined by an impartial body. The process will be undergirded by integrity, with witnesses and other persons giving evidence swearing oaths to tell the truth. Judicial officers appointed to the panel shall take an oath of secrecy and competency to perform to the best of their abilities.
Political Sensitivity	The Forum acknowledges the sensitive political environment in which MPs operate and shall design all procedures to minimise unnecessary reputational harm while ensuring accountability.
Accountability	The Forum is institutionally responsible for the implementation, monitoring and periodic review of this Policy.

CHAPTER 2-PROHIBITED CONDUCT

Article 5: Forms of Sexual Harassment

The following conduct is prohibited under this Policy. This list is illustrative and not exhaustive:

5.1. Physical Conduct

- Unwanted physical contact of a sexual nature, including touching, grabbing, pinching, kissing or embracing;
- Unwelcome touching, including pinching, patting, rubbing or purposefully brushing up against a person;
- Physical invasion of personal space in a manner that is sexual or intimidating; or
- Any form of sexual assault or attempted sexual assault.

5.2. Verbal Conduct

- Sexual advances, propositions or requests for sexual favours, whether explicit or implied;
- Making sexual comments about appearance, clothing or body parts;
- Rating a person's sexuality; name-calling or using slurs with a gender or sexual connotation;
- Sexually suggestive, offensive or demeaning comments, jokes, anecdotes or innuendos;
- Repeated, unwanted requests for personal or social engagement, including dates, after an explicit refusal; or
- Threats, whether explicit or implied, linking submission to or rejection of sexual conduct to any benefit or detriment.

5.3. Non-Verbal and Visual Conduct

- Staring in a sexually suggestive manner; leering, sexually suggestive gestures, including pelvic thrusts, 'twerking' or similar movements;
- Display or distribution of sexually explicit, offensive or demeaning images, materials or objects; or
- Exposure of genitalia or any form of indecent exposure.

5.4. Written and Electronic/Digital Conduct

- Sending sexually explicit, offensive or unwanted messages, images or materials through any electronic/digital or written medium, including email, text message, social media or messaging applications;
- Sharing or displaying sexually inappropriate images or videos in any format;
- Unwanted electronic/digital surveillance, monitoring or tracking of a sexual or intimidatory nature;
- Public posting or sharing of sexually demeaning content relating to a Participant.
- Any electronic manipulation of a sexual nature of the image of a Participant using technology or Artificial Intelligence.

5.5. Psychological and Coercive Conduct

- Psychological violence, including intimidation, threats, humiliation or emotional manipulation intended to coerce, control or demean;

- Quid pro quo conduct, where participation in Forum Activities or access to any benefit is made conditional, explicitly or implicitly, on submission to sexual conduct;
- Any pattern of conduct, even if individual acts may appear minor, which cumulatively creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

Article 6: Other Forms of Prohibited Harassment

6.1. In addition to sexual harassment, the following forms of harassment are prohibited on any ground, in all Forum Activities, including but not limited: to gender, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, physical ability, physical appearance, ethnicity, race, national origin, political affiliation, age, or religion, such as:

6.1.1 Intentional abuse of power relations, offensive behaviour intended to humiliate or undermine an individual or group;

6.1.2 Aggressive language, profanity, shouting or threats directed at another person;

6.1.3 Excluding or isolating a person from professional Forum activities without reason or legitimate authority;

6.1.4 Persistent negative comments directed at a person or group, including rumour, gossip and ridicule;

6.1.5 Making derogatory or demeaning comments about someone's sexual orientation, gender identity, race, ethnicity, religion, age, disability or any other personal characteristic; or

6.1.6 Any other conduct that a reasonable person in the same circumstances would find offensive, humiliating or demeaning.

6.2. Where conduct constitutes both sexual harassment under Article 5 and broader harassment under this Article, the provisions of this Policy shall apply cumulatively.

Article 7: Aggravating Circumstances

The following shall be treated as aggravating circumstances in the determination of sanctions:

- Abuse of power, authority or seniority by the Respondent;
- Targeting of a person known to be in a vulnerable position;
- Repeated or persistent conduct despite clear indications of unwantedness;
- Conduct involving multiple perpetrators or targeting multiple Complainants;
- Deliberate use of the Forum's institutional platform to facilitate harassment; or
- Retaliation against a Complainant or Witness.

CHAPTER 3-OBLIGATIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Article 8: Obligations of the Forum

The Forum undertakes to:

8.1. Adopt, implement and periodically review this Policy in accordance with Article 27;

8.2. Ensure that all Participants are made aware of this Policy and its reporting mechanisms prior to or at the commencement of each Forum Activity;

8.3. Provide mandatory training and capacity development to all Participants in accordance with Part IX;

8.4. Establish and maintain accessible, confidential and multi-channel reporting mechanisms as prescribed in Article 12;

8.5. Offer both informal and formal resolution options to persons who report harassment under this Policy;

8.6. Constitute and resource a part time Independent Committee of Retired Judges or Retired Judicial Officers as provided in Article 17;

8.7. Protect Complainants, witnesses and any persons who participate in good faith in proceedings under this Policy from retaliation;

8.8. Amend the Forum's constitutional and institutional documents in accordance with Part VIII;

8.9. Publish periodic reports on the implementation of this Policy, in a form that preserves confidentiality, for consideration by the Plenary Assembly and the Forum's designated monitoring body.

Article 9: Obligations of MPs and Stakeholders

All MPs, Secretariat staff, Member Parliament staff and Stakeholders who participate in Forum Activities are obliged to:

9.1. Treat all other Participants with dignity and respect at all times;

9.2. Refrain from engaging in any conduct prohibited by Articles 5 and 6 of this Policy;

9.3. Report any instance of harassment or sexual harassment they witness or become aware of, in accordance with Part IV, where it is safe and appropriate to do so;

9.4. Cooperate fully with any investigation conducted under this Policy;

9.5. Maintain the confidentiality of all information relating to complaints and investigations under this Policy;

9.6. Comply with the dress code standards prescribed in Article 25; and

9.7. Acknowledge receipt of and undertake to comply with this Policy upon commencement of participation in Forum Activities, by signature of a Declaration of Compliance as may be prescribed by the Secretariat.

Article 10: Obligations of Presiding Officers and Speakers

10.1. Speakers and Presiding Officers shall model exemplary conduct consistent with this Policy at all times during Forum Activities;

10.2. Where a Speaker or Presiding Officer witnesses or receives a report of sexual harassment or harassment during Forum Activities, they shall promptly refer the matter to the Secretariat in accordance with Article 12;

10.3. Speakers and Presiding Officers shall actively promote awareness of this Policy among the MPs and parliamentary staff they lead;

10.4. A Speaker or Presiding Officer shall not use their position or authority to shield a Respondent from investigation or accountability under this Policy.

CHAPTER 4-REPORTING AND COMPLAINTS PROCEDURES

Article 11: Right to Report

11.1. A person who has experienced or witnessed harassment in the context of Forum Activities has the right to make a complaint under this Policy.

11.2. A complaint may be made by the person directly affected (the Complainant) or, with the express consent of the person affected, by another person on their behalf.

11.3. A complaint should normally be filed promptly. A formal complaint must be submitted within two (2) years from either the date of the incident or, in the case of repeated incidents, the date of the most recent incident, unless the Committee determines that exceptional circumstances warrant a longer period.

11.4. There shall be no minimum threshold of severity for a complaint to be received. The Committee shall assess the seriousness of the conduct in the course of investigation.

11.5. A person may make an informal report without committing to a formal complaint, for the purpose of seeking advice or support.

11.6. The Secretariat shall maintain a confidential register of informal reports.

Article 12: Reporting Channels

12.1 The Forum shall establish and maintain the following reporting channels, communicated, as stated below, at each Forum Activity:

Channel	Description	Contact
Designated Focal Point	A trained Secretariat staff member designated as RASHP Focal Point, available throughout each Forum Activity	To be published and communicated at each Forum Activity
Secretary General	Complaints may be submitted directly to the Secretary General or her/his designate	info@sadcpf.org | +264 61 287 0000
Confidential Electronic Portal	A dedicated, encrypted online reporting portal accessible to all Forum participants, including for virtual/hybrid events	Report | FaceUp
Independent Committee	Complaints may be submitted directly to the Independent Committee of Retired Judges or retired judicial officers once constituted	Contact details published upon constitution

Channel	Description	Contact
Emergency Channel	In cases of immediate safety risk, any Secretariat staff member or Senior Forum official may receive a complaint and must act immediately	Applies at all Forum Activities

12.2 Victims/Survivors may also seek help from other relevant authorities, such as national police, bearing in mind the applicable legal framework.

Article 13: Informal Resolution Procedure

13.1. A Victim/Survivor who chooses to engage first in an informal procedure, based on an open, non-threatening and non-contentious approach, may request that the Focal Point or Secretariat facilitate the following options:

- Approach and attempt to resolve the matter directly with the alleged perpetrator, with the support of the Focal Point; or
- Involve a neutral third party to facilitate a discussion with the alleged perpetrator, aimed at reaching a mutually acceptable resolution.

13.2. Participation in the informal procedure is entirely voluntary and shall only proceed with the agreement of the Victim/Survivor. The informal procedure shall not stop investigation initiated by national authorities.

13.3. An unsuccessful attempt to resolve the matter informally does not preclude the lodging of a formal complaint under Article 14. Notes of informal proceedings shall be kept confidentially by the Focal Point.

13.4. The informal procedure shall not be used in cases involving allegations of physical sexual assault or conduct of equivalent severity, which shall proceed directly to the formal procedure.

Article 14: Formal Complaint Procedure

14.1. A formal complaint must be submitted in writing using the Complaint Form at Annexure A, or in such other form as the Secretariat may accept.

14.2. A formal complaint must be signed and dated by the Complainant. Anonymous complaints shall not be considered under the formal procedure, though they may be received and recorded informally by the Secretariat as part of institutional awareness.

14.3. A formal complaint must be as detailed and substantiated as possible, setting out the nature of the conduct, the date(s) and location(s) of the incident(s), the identity of the alleged perpetrator (if known), and the names of any witnesses.

14.4. Upon receipt of a formal complaint, the Focal Point shall within five (5) working days acknowledge receipt in writing, provide the complainant with information on the process and available support, and refer the matter to the Committee.

14.5. A formal procedure shall only be launched with the informed consent of the Victim/Survivor, in accordance with Article 15.

Article 15: Complainant Consent and Complaint Withdrawal

15.1. A formal investigation under Article 20 shall only be initiated with the informed consent of the Victim/Survivor. Before consenting, the Victim/Survivor shall be fully informed of:

- the investigation process and its implications including the need for the investigator to collect a meaningful statement from him or her;
- the fact that the complaint and relevant information will be shared with the alleged perpetrator in the course of a fair investigation;
- the confidentiality protections in place; and
- the zero-tolerance approach against retaliation.

15.2. Where a complaint is submitted by a person other than the Victim/Survivor, the Focal Point or Committee shall seek the express consent of the Victim/Survivor before deciding whether to proceed with any investigation.

15.3. In exceptional circumstances where there is credible evidence of a risk to the safety of other Forum participants, the Secretary General may, after consultation with the Committee, decide to proceed with protective measures or a limited investigation even in the absence of the Victim/Survivor's consent.

15.4. If a Victim/Survivor wishes to withdraw a complaint at any stage, a written request must be submitted to the Focal Point or Committee. On receipt of such a request, the Focal Point or Secretary General may seek information on the reasons underlying the withdrawal, and may decide, in exceptional circumstances involving safety risks, to continue with limited investigation.

Article 16: Confidentiality and Non-Retaliation

16.1. All persons involved in proceedings under this Policy shall maintain strict confidentiality. The identities of the Victim/Survivor, alleged perpetrator, Witnesses and any persons giving evidence shall only be shared, when necessary, with those directly involved in the investigation, and shall not be made public during or after the investigation.

16.2. Breach of confidentiality shall itself constitute a disciplinary matter under this Policy.

16.3. No person shall be subjected to retaliation for making a complaint in good faith, participating in an investigation, or reporting a violation of this Policy. The Victim/Survivor shall be protected against retaliation from the moment the complaint is made, throughout the entire process and after the case is closed. Any perceived retaliation should be reported immediately to the Focal Point.

16.4. Where a complaint is found to have been made in bad faith or with malicious intent, the Committee may recommend appropriate disciplinary action against the Complainant.

CHAPTER 5-INVESTIGATIONS AND ADJUDICATION

Article 17: Independent Committee of Retired Judges

17.1. The Forum shall establish a part time Independent Committee of Retired Judges or retired judicial officers ("the Committee") to receive and oversee investigations relating to, and adjudicate complaints of, sexual harassment and harassment submitted under this Policy. The Committee shall be a part time Committee to be constituted by the Secretary General, with the ratification of EXCO, when a complaint is received at the Forum.

17.2. The Committee shall be composed of three (3) members, being retired judges or retired judicial officers drawn from SADC Member States, appointed by the Plenary Assembly, on the recommendation of the Executive Committee, having regard to:

- Demonstrated judicial integrity, independence and experience in matters involving human rights, gender-based violence or institutional misconduct;
- Geographic and gender representation, with a minimum of one (1) female and one (1) male judge or judicial officer; and
- The absence of any actual or perceived conflict of interest with the Forum or its Member Parliaments.

17.3. Members of the Committee shall serve for a period of two (2) years, renewable once.

17.4. The Committee shall adopt its own rules of procedure, consistent with this Policy, subject to approval by the Executive Committee.

17.5. Members of the Committee shall be bound by strict obligations of confidentiality and impartiality.

17.6. The Committee shall be supported by the Secretariat in administrative matters only.

17.7. Pending formal constitution of the Committee, the Secretary General shall designate an interim investigative mechanism, which may include an appropriately qualified external legal expert.

17.8. The Committee shall have the power to summon competent witnesses, although witnesses shall not be compellable.

Article 18: Recusal by Members of Committee

18.1. If any member of the Committee is a Victim/Survivor or an alleged perpetrator in a matter before the Committee, that member must immediately recuse themselves from all deliberations and decisions on that matter.

18.2. If a Victim/Survivor or an alleged perpetrator is from the same SADC Member State as a Committee member, that member must recuse themselves from all deliberations and decisions on that matter.

18.3. Any other potential conflict of interest including prior professional, personal or political relationships with any party must be declared by the relevant Committee member

to the other members of the Committee, as soon as it becomes apparent.

18.4. In the event of a recusal, the remaining Committee members may proceed with the matter before them, or the Executive Committee may appoint a substitute member for the purposes of the matter in question.

Article 19: External Independent Investigators

19.1. In formal investigations, the Committee shall appoint external, independent investigators whether an agency or qualified individual consultant with relevant experience in sexual harassment, human rights or institutional misconduct investigations, to conduct the investigation and produce a written investigations report.

19.2. The appointment of external investigators may be dispensed with where the Committee and the Victim/Survivor agree in writing that this is unnecessary in the particular circumstances, and where the Committee is satisfied that it can conduct a fair and impartial investigation without such appointment.

19.3. External investigators shall be bound by strict obligations of confidentiality and shall operate under the oversight of the Committee.

19.4. The costs of external investigators shall be borne by the Forum as part of the budgetary provisions for the RASHP.

Article 20: Investigations Procedure

20.1. Upon receipt of a formal complaint and confirmation of the Victim's/Survivor's informed consent, the Committee shall within five (5) working days:

- Acknowledge receipt in writing to the Complainant;
- Notify the Respondent in writing of the complaint, summarising the allegations;
- Determine whether any immediate protective measures are required;
- Appoint external investigators in accordance with Article 19.

20.2. The investigation shall be conducted in accordance with the following principles:

- **Impartiality:** the Committee shall approach all investigations without predetermined conclusions;
- **Thoroughness:** the Committee shall gather all relevant evidence, including written submissions, documentary evidence and witness testimony;
- **Timeliness:** the investigation shall be completed within sixty (60) working days of receipt of the complaint, save in exceptional circumstances;
- **Sensitivity:** all interactions shall be conducted in a trauma-informed manner.

20.3. The Secretary General, on advice of the Committee and in consultation with the Victim/Survivor, may decide that interim protective measures be taken, including measures to physically separate the alleged perpetrator and the Victim/Survivor on a temporary basis.

20.4. The Committee shall prepare a written report of its findings and recommendations, to be submitted to the Secretary General and the Executive Committee.

Article 21: Rights of Parties

In the course of all proceedings under this Policy:

21.1. The Victim/Survivor has the right to:

- be treated with dignity and sensitivity;
- be informed of the progress of the investigation;
- be assisted by a support person (who is not a legal representative) at interviews;
- receive the outcome of the investigation in writing; and
- withdraw their complaint in accordance with Article 15(4).

21.2. The Respondent has the right to:

- be informed of the allegations in sufficient detail to prepare a response;
- be aware that the complaint and relevant information will be shared with them as part of a fair investigation;
- submit a written response and supporting evidence;
- be heard; and
- receive the outcome in writing.

21.3. Both parties have the right to be kept informed of timelines and any delays in the investigation.

CHAPTER 6-SANCTIONS, REMEDIES AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Article 22: Graduated Sanctions

22.1. Where the Committee finds that harassment has been established on a balance of probabilities, it shall recommend appropriate sanctions from the following graduated range:

Level	Sanction	Applicable Conduct
Level 1 — Formal Warning	Written formal warning; mandatory counselling and remedial training module	First-time, less severe violations; sexist/demeaning remarks; isolated non-physical incidents
Level 2 — Restricted Participation	Temporary suspension from one or more Forum Activities; public censure by the relevant presiding body; conditions may include acknowledgement of wrongdoing and assurances of non-repetition	First-time but with high severity; Repeated Level 1 violations; verbal harassment; hostile environment conduct

Level	Sanction	Applicable Conduct
Level 3 — Suspension + Governance Bar	Suspension from Forum Activities for up to two (2) years; suspension of the right to hold any official governance or leadership position within the Forum; mandatory gender sensitivity training; notification to home Parliament	Serious harassment; physical conduct; coercive or retaliatory conduct
Level 4 — Exclusion	Permanent exclusion from all Forum Activities; permanent bar from Forum governance positions; formal notification to home Parliament and, where applicable, national authorities	Most severe violations; sexual assault; repeated serious harassment; abuse of power

22.2. Sanctions shall be imposed by the Executive Committee on the recommendation of the Committee.

22.3. The implementation of sanctions in respect of MPs is subject to the competence of the Forum; the Forum shall formally communicate its findings and recommendations to the Respondent's home Parliament for further action.

22.4. All sanctions shall be recorded in a confidential register maintained by the Secretariat.

Article 23: External Legal Consequences

23.1. This Policy does not preclude the pursuit of remedies or sanctions available under National law.

23.2. Where conduct constitutes a criminal offence under applicable National law, the Forum shall, with the consent of the Victim/Survivor where appropriate, report the matter to the competent National authorities.

23.3. The Forum shall cooperate with competent National authorities in any investigation or prosecution arising from conduct covered by this Policy.

23.4. The Victim/Survivor may independently seek help from other relevant authorities, such as the police, bearing in mind the applicable legal framework.

Article 24: Remedies for Complainants

In addition to sanctions on the Respondent, the Committee may recommend the following remedies:

24.1. A formal apology from the Respondent, where appropriate, and requested by the Victim/Survivor;

24.2. Practical adjustments to Forum arrangements to protect the Victim/Survivor's comfort and safety;

24.3. Access to psychosocial support services arranged by the Secretariat;

24.4. Any other appropriate measure designed to restore the Victim/Survivor's dignity and facilitate continued participation in Forum Activities.

CHAPTER 7-REFERENCE FRAMEWORK

Article 25: Institutional Effect to Regional and International Commitments

25.1. This Policy also gives practical institutional effect to regional and international commitments concerning human rights, democracy, the rule of law, equality, non-discrimination, gender equality, gender-based violence prevention, safe work environments and gender-responsive parliamentary institutions.

25.2. This Policy is guided by the following instruments and principles, to the extent applicable to the Forum and its Member Parliaments:

Instrument or framework	Relevance to this Policy
SADC Treaty	Affirms human rights, democracy and the rule of law as foundational SADC principles and prohibits discrimination, including on grounds of gender, race, culture, religion, political views, ill-health and disability.
SADC Protocol on Gender and Development	Requires the definition and prohibition of sexual harassment in all spheres, deterrent sanctions, gender-responsive measures and action to address cultural and social practices that legitimise gender-based violence.

Instrument or framework	Relevance to this Policy
SADC Vision 2050 and RISDP 2020-2030	Recognise peace, security, good governance, gender equality, justice, freedom and inclusive participation as central to regional integration and institutional development.
Universal Declaration of Human Rights, African Charter, CEDAW and Beijing Platform for Action, SADC Model Law on GBV, AU Convention for Ending Violence against Women and Girls	Affirm human dignity, equality, non-discrimination and the elimination of violence and discrimination against women.
ILO Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019	Recognises the right of everyone to a world of work free from violence and harassment, including gender-based violence and harassment.

Instrument or framework	Relevance to this Policy
IPU Policy to Prevent and Address Harassment, including Sexual Harassment, at IPU Assemblies and other IPU Events (October 2023)	Provides the principal comparative guide structure for purpose, scope, prohibited conduct, prevention, complaint process, basic principles, due process, consequences and monitoring.
Parliamentary procedure, privilege and institutional autonomy	Requires procedures to be adapted to parliamentary environments while ensuring that privilege is not misused to shield harassment, retaliation, intimidation or abuse of power.

CHAPTER 8-LEGAL AMENDMENTS AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Article 26: Amendments to Statutory Documents

The following amendments to the Forum's statutory documents are required to give full legal effect to this Policy, and proposed for adoption by the Plenary Assembly:

26.1. Amendment to the Forum's Constitution

- Insertion of a clause expressly recognising the right of all Participants to a safe, respectful and harassment-free environment and affirming zero tolerance of harassment in all forms;
- Insertion of a provision establishing the Independent Committee of Retired Judges or retired judicial officers as a part time organ of the Forum.

26.2. Amendment to the Rules of Procedure

- Insertion of a new Chapter incorporating the provisions of this Policy by reference;
- Insertion of provisions empowering presiding bodies to take immediate protective measures, including temporary removal of a Respondent from a session, pending investigation.

26.3. Amendment to the Administrative Rules

- Insertion of provisions governing administrative procedures for complaints management;

- Insertion of provisions governing the resourcing and support of the Independent Committee;
- Insertion of provisions governing the confidential register of complaints and sanctions.

26.4. Draft amendment texts are set out in Annexure C.

26.5. Proposed amendments shall be submitted to the Legal Sub-Committee of the Executive Committee within sixty (60) days of adoption of this Policy.

Article 27: Implementation, Monitoring and Review

27.1. The Secretary General shall be responsible for the implementation of this Policy and shall report to the Executive Committee at each regular session.

27.2. The Forum shall constitute the Independent Committee of Retired Judges or Retired Judicial Officers as soon as a complaint is registered at the Forum.

27.3. The Secretariat shall develop operational guidelines for the implementation of Articles 12, 13, 14 and 22 within sixty (60) days of adoption.

27.4. The Forum's Committee on Gender and Development (or such equivalent standing body as may be designated by the Executive Committee, hereinafter "the Monitoring Body") shall be responsible for the regular monitoring of the implementation of this Policy and its accompanying Operational Guidelines.

27.5. The Monitoring Body shall present a report to the Plenary Assembly every two (2) years, setting out the results of

implementation, lessons learned, statistical data (presented anonymously), and any recommended revisions to this Policy.

27.6. This Policy shall be comprehensively reviewed every four (4) years, or earlier if required by developments in regional or international best practice, changes in the Forum's structures or complementary policies, or as recommended by the Monitoring Body.

27.7. Any person who considers that an investigation was conducted in breach of the procedural requirements of this Policy may submit a written complaint to the Secretary General, who shall refer it to the Executive Committee for determination.

CHAPTER 9-CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT GUIDE

MANDATORY CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT GUIDE FOR ALL FORUM PARTICIPANTS

This Capacity Development Guide forms a mandatory and integral part of the RASHP. It is designed for use in facilitated training sessions, as a reference for individual Participants, and as the curriculum for the Forum's capacity development sessions in 2027 and 2028 and thereafter on a biennial basis as provided in Article 27.

Section 1: Purpose and Objectives

- Build a shared understanding of what constitutes harassment and sexual harassment in the inter-parliamentary context;
- Equip all Participants to identify prohibited conduct — including subtle and often overlooked forms — and understand their obligations under the RASHP;
- Provide clear, step-by-step guidance on how to report harassment and how to support a colleague who has experienced it;
- Develop Participant’s confidence to act against sexual harassment and harassment when they encounter it;
- Foster an institutional culture of dignity, respect and zero tolerance within all Forum Activities.

Section 2: Understanding Harassment - Key Concepts

2.1 What Is Sexual Harassment?

Sexual harassment is any unwanted conduct of a sexual nature - physical, verbal, non-verbal, written or electronic/digital - that violates a person's dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. The test is whether the conduct is UNWANTED and whether it AFFECTS DIGNITY. The intention of the person engaging in the conduct is not the determining factor - "I was only joking" is not a defence.

2.2 What Is Broader Harassment?

Harassment is any improper or unwelcome conduct that might reasonably be expected or perceived to cause offence or humiliation. It covers conduct based on gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, age, disability, religion, political affiliation or any other ground. Harassment may be a single severe incident or a pattern of conduct that cumulatively creates a hostile environment.

2.3 The Spectrum of Prohibited Conduct

Examples of Conduct That May Constitute Harassment or Sexual Harassment

PHYSICAL: Unwanted touching, patting, hugging, brushing against someone, blocking their path, or any form of sexual assault.

VERBAL: Sexual comments about appearance or body; sexual jokes; repeated requests for dates after refusal; slurs based on gender, race, religion or any other ground; threatening language.

NON-VERBAL: Leering; sexually suggestive gestures; displaying demeaning material; intentionally excluding someone from professional activities.

ELECTRONIC: Unwanted sexual or demeaning messages, emails or social media contact, including in virtual meeting platforms.

PSYCHOLOGICAL: Using power to coerce, intimidate or manipulate; creating a climate of fear or humiliation; persistent negative comments, rumour and ridicule.

2.4 Power Dynamics in Parliamentary Environments

Power imbalances based on seniority, gender, political affiliation or institutional role can make it significantly harder for a targeted person to object to or report sexual harassment. This is why this Policy establishes confidential, multi-channel reporting, both informal and formal resolution options, and strong non-retaliation protections.

2.5 Virtual and Hybrid Events

Sexual Harassment and harassment can occur in virtual and hybrid Forum settings just as in in-person meetings. Unwanted electronic messages, demeaning comments in video calls, sharing

of inappropriate images or materials during online sessions, and other digital conduct all fall within the scope of this Policy. Forum participants are reminded that conduct in virtual settings is subject to exactly the same standards and consequences as in-person conduct.

Section 3: Obligations and Responsibilities in Practice

3.1 For All Participants

- Treat every colleague and stakeholder with dignity and always respect, including in virtual and digital settings.
- If uncertain whether a particular interaction is appropriate, ask: "Would I be comfortable if this interaction were observed and reported publicly?" If not, do not proceed.
- If you witness sexual harassment or harrassment, consider: speaking to the harasser if safe to do so; supporting the person targeted; or reporting the incident through the appropriate channel.
- Maintain strict confidentiality regarding any complaint or investigation you become aware of.

3.2 For Speakers and Presiding Officers

- Model the conduct expected of all Participants.
- Intervene promptly if you witness or are informed of an incident; refer the matter to the Secretariat.
- Never use your institutional authority to protect a respondent from accountability.

3.3 For the Secretariat

- Ensure all Participants are briefed on this Policy and reporting channels before each Forum Activity, including virtual and hybrid events.
- Provide a designated, trained Focal Point available throughout all Forum Activities.
- Handle all reports with sensitivity, confidentiality and urgency.

Section 4: How to Report - Step by Step

Step 1: Consider Your Options

You may choose to: report informally for advice and support without committing to a formal complaint; engage the informal resolution procedure under Article 13; or submit a formal complaint under Article 14. Both informal and formal options are available and you will not be pressured to pursue any particular course.

Step 2: Submit Your Complaint

For a formal complaint, complete Annexure A (Complaint Form) signed and dated. Include as much detail as possible but incomplete forms will also be accepted. Submit through any channel listed in Article 12.

Step 3: Consent and Acknowledgement

You will receive written acknowledgement within five (5) working days. Before a formal investigation begins, you will be fully informed of the process and asked for your informed consent to

proceed. You retain the right to withdraw at any stage by written request.

Step 4: Investigation

External independent investigators will conduct the investigation under the oversight of the Committee. You will be kept informed of progress, and may be accompanied by a support person (not a legal representative) at interviews. Witnesses may testify on your behalf during the investigation phase.

Step 5: Outcome

You will receive the outcome in writing. If sexual harassment or harassment is established, sanctions will be applied to the Respondent and remedies considered for you.

Your Rights Throughout the Process

- You have the right to be treated with dignity and respect.
- You have the right to confidentiality — your identity will not be made public.
- You have the right to be accompanied by a support person at interviews.
- You have the right to be protected from retaliation from the moment you report.
- You have the right to informed consent — a formal investigation will not proceed without your agreement.
- You have the right to withdraw your complaint at any stage by written request.
- You have the right to seek assistance from National authorities, such as the police.

Section 5: Supporting a Colleague Who Has Experienced Sexual Harassment or Harassment

- Listen without judgement.
- Acknowledge their experience and thank them for trusting you.
- Remind them that what happened is not their fault.
- Explain both informal and formal reporting options and offer to help them access support.
- Respect their decision, including if they choose not to report. Your role is to support, not to pressure.
- Maintain strict confidentiality.
- If there is an immediate safety risk, inform the Focal Point immediately.

Section 6: Scenario-Based Training Modules

The following scenarios are designed for use in facilitated group training. Facilitators should encourage open and reflective discussion.

Scenario 1

SITUATION: During a Standing Committee meeting, Hon. A repeatedly invites a parliamentary staff member from another Member Parliament to join them for dinner 'to discuss parliamentary matters'. The staff member politely declines each time. Hon. A continues to press, saying ***'You're being too formal we're colleagues here***.' The staff member feels uncomfortable and anxious.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Does this constitute prohibited conduct under the RASHP? Under Article 5 or Article 6, or both?
2. What factors make this situation particularly sensitive in the inter-parliamentary context?
3. What should the staff member do? What informal and formal options are available?
4. What should a bystander who observes this situation do?

Scenario 2 - Virtual/Hybrid Context

SITUATION: During a hybrid Joint Session held over a video conferencing platform, a Participant repeatedly sends private chat messages to another Participant containing sexual jokes and comments about their appearance. The recipient is visible on camera presenting to the session and cannot respond. After the session, the messages continue via WhatsApp.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Does this conduct fall within the scope of the RASHP, given that it occurred in a virtual setting?
2. Does the continuation of the conduct after the session, via WhatsApp, affect the analysis?
3. What evidence might the recipient gather, and how would they submit a complaint?
4. How does the digital context affect investigation and evidence collection?

Scenario 3 - The Group Chat

SITUATION: A WhatsApp group is created among MPs attending a Forum Plenary Assembly. One MP begins sharing sexually suggestive memes and jokes. Several members laugh along. Hon. B finds the content offensive and demeaning but is reluctant to object for fear of being seen as difficult.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Does the conduct fall within the RASHP? Does it matter that it is in a private group chat?
2. Is Hon. B's discomfort valid even if others find the content funny?
3. What are Hon. B's informal and formal options under the RASHP?

Scenario 4 - Broader Harassment (Non-Sexual)

SITUATION: During a workshop, a senior MP repeatedly makes dismissive comments about the contributions of MPs from a particular SADC Member State, referencing their country's development status in a demeaning way. One of the MPs targeted finds the comments humiliating and begins to avoid participating in Forum sessions.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Does this conduct constitute 'harassment' under Article 6 of the RASHP, even though it is not sexual in nature?
2. Is the fact that the comments were made publicly, rather than privately, relevant?
3. What reporting options does the targeted MP have?
4. How does this scenario illustrate the importance of the RASHP covering harassment on all grounds, not only sexual harassment?

Scenario 5 - The Senior Colleague

SITUATION: During a regional Forum workshop, a senior MP from Country X makes repeated comments to a junior female MP from Country Y about her appearance — 'You are too beautiful to be concerned with such serious matters' — in front of other delegates. The junior MP smiles uncomfortably but says nothing.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How would you characterise the senior MP's comments?

2. Why might the junior MP have smiled and remained silent? What does this tell us about power dynamics?

3. What could a bystander have done in the moment?

4. Would this be addressed through the informal or formal procedure, or both?

CHAPTER 10-RESOURCES AND CONTACTS

Resource / Contact	Details
RASHP Focal Point (Secretariat)	To be designated and communicated at each Forum Activity, including virtual/hybrid events
Secretary General, SADC PF	info@sadcpf.org | +264 61 287 0000 | SADC Forum House, Parliament Gardens, Windhoek, Namibia
Independent Committee of Retired Judges	Contact details to be published upon constitution of the Committee
IPU Policy on Harassment (2023)	IPU Policy to Prevent and Address Harassment at IPU Assemblies and Events — www.ipu.org
CPA Model Policy	Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Model Anti-Harassment Policy — www.cpahq.org
SADC Protocol on Gender	SADC Protocol on Gender and Development (2008, as amended 2016) — www.sadc.int
National Authorities	Victims/survivors retain the right at all times to contact national police or other competent national authorities

ANNEXURE A-COMPLAINT FORM

SADC PARLIAMENTARY FORUM — REGIONAL ANTI-SEXUAL HARASSMENT POLICY

CONFIDENTIAL FORMAL COMPLAINT FORM

Instructions: This form must be signed and dated by the Complainant. Anonymous formal complaints cannot be considered under the formal procedure. Please complete all sections as fully as possible, incomplete forms will also be accepted. This form is strictly confidential and will be handled in accordance with Article 16 of the RASHP.

SECTION A: COMPLAINANT DETAILS	*(Strictly Confidential)*
Full Name:	
Role / Affiliation:	MP / Secretariat Staff / Stakeholder (circle as applicable)
Member Parliament / Organisation:	
Contact Email:	
Contact Phone:	

Forum Activity at which incident occurred:	
Date(s) of Incident(s):	
Location / Platform of Incident(s):	(in-person venue or virtual platform)

SECTION B: RESPONDENT DETAILS (if known)

Name / Description: _____ Role / Affiliation: _____

SECTION C: NATURE AND DESCRIPTION OF CONDUCT COMPLAINED OF

Type of conduct (tick all that apply):

☐ Sexual harassment ☐ Gender-based harassment ☐ Race/ethnicity-based harassment ☐ Other harassment (specify): _____

Please describe what happened, in as much detail as you are comfortable providing:

SECTION D: WITNESSES AND EVIDENCE

Names of any witnesses (if known): _____

Supporting evidence (e.g. messages, screenshots, documents, photographs): _____

SECTION E: CONSENT, OUTCOME SOUGHT AND DECLARATION

☐ I consent to a formal investigation being initiated on the basis of this complaint. I understand that as part of a fair investigation, my complaint and relevant information will be shared with the alleged perpetrator.

☐ I do not yet consent to a formal investigation. I wish to receive advice and support only at this stage.

Outcome sought (optional): _____

I declare that the information provided in this form is true and accurate to the best of my knowledge. I understand that submitting a complaint in bad faith may itself constitute a violation of the RASHP.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

ANNEXURE B-TABLE OF SANCTIONS

Level	Sanction	Applicable Conduct	Additional Requirements
Level 1	Formal written warning	First-time, less severe violations; demeaning remarks	Remedial training; counselling
Level 2	Temporary suspension; public censure; conditions may include acknowledgement and non-repetition assurances	Repeated violations or first-time violation with high severity; verbal harassment; hostile environment	Full Capacity Development programme
Level 3	Suspension up to 2 years; suspension of governance position; notification to home Parliament	Serious harassment; physical conduct; coercive/retaliatory conduct	Mandatory gender sensitivity programme
Level 4	Permanent exclusion; permanent governance bar; notification to home Parliament and national authorities	Sexual assault; repeated serious harassment; abuse of power	Referral to national authorities as appropriate

ANNEXURE C-DRAFT LEGAL AMENDMENTS

The following are draft provisions proposed for incorporation into the Forum's constitutional and institutional documents, subject to review by the Legal Sub-Committee of the Executive Committee prior to submission to the Plenary Assembly.

C.1- Proposed Amendment to the Forum's Constitution

New Article [X]: Safe, Respectful and Sexual Harassment and Harrassment-Free Environment

1) The Forum affirms that every Participant in Forum Activities has the right to a safe, respectful and harassment-free environment, free from any form of harassment. including sexual harassment, grounded in the equal dignity of all persons regardless of gender, race, nationality, age, disability, religion or any other ground.

2) Harassment and sexual harassment in any form are absolutely prohibited in all Forum Activities and in all interactions conducted under the auspices of the Forum.

3) The Forum shall establish and maintain the mechanisms prescribed in the Regional Anti-Sexual Harassment Policy (RASHP) for the prevention, reporting and adjudication of sexual harassment and harassment.

New Article [Y]: Independent Committee of Retired Judges or Retired Judicial Officers

1) There is hereby established an Independent Committee of Retired Judges or Retired Judicial Officers, composed of three

retired judges or retired judicial officers appointed by the Secretariat on part time basis.

2) The Committee shall have the mandate, composition and powers prescribed in the RASHP.

C.2 Proposed Amendment to the Rules of Procedure

New Rule [X]: Enforcement of the RASHP During Sessions

1) The Presiding Officer of any Forum session, whether in-person, virtual or hybrid, is empowered to take immediate protective measures where there are reasonable grounds to believe that a Participant has committed or is at risk of committing an act of sexual harassment or harassment, including temporary removal or disconnection of the Respondent from the session, pending investigation.

2) Any such measure shall be referred to the Secretary General and the Committee within twenty-four (24) hours.

C.3 Proposed Amendment to the Administrative Rules

New Rule [X]: Administration of the RASHP

1) The Secretariat shall designate a RASHP Focal Point, trained in trauma-informed complaint handling, to be present and accessible at all Forum Activities, including in virtual and hybrid settings.

2) The Secretariat shall maintain a confidential register of all complaints, investigations and outcomes, subject to biennial anonymous reporting to the Monitoring Body and periodic reporting to the Executive Committee.

3) The administrative expenses of the Committee and any external investigators appointed under Article 19 shall be budgeted for by the Forum as standing items in its annual budget.

END OF THE REGIONAL ANTI-SEXUAL HARASSMENT POLICY (RASHP), 2026