

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

BY THE SECRETARY GENERAL

OF THE SADC PARLIAMENTARY FORUM

MS BOEMO SEKGOMA

DURING THE OFFICIAL OPENING CEREMONY

OF THE

59TH PLENARY ASSEMBLY SESSION

HOSTED BY

THE PARLIAMENT OF THE KINGDOM OF ESWATINI

20 TO 27 NOVEMBER 2026

THEME: ***"HARNESSING POLITICAL LEADERSHIP, PROGRESSIVE CULTURE AND DATA TO ACCELERATE THE ERADICATION OF CHILD MARRIAGE IN THE SADC REGION." MITIGATION AND ADAPTATION"***

SALUTATIONS

HOSTING THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY FOR THE 59TH ASSEMBLY BY THE PARLIAMENT OF ESWATINI

Today, the SADC Parliamentary Forum family comes home to the Kingdom of Eswatini. **For the third time,** the Parliament of the Kingdom of Eswatini **opens its doors to our** Plenary Assembly**: in 2004, in 2016, and now, in 2026.** Three times, Eswatini has answered the call. Three times, Eswatini has welcomed this family. That is not coincidence; that is commitment. And for it, we thank you. It is our privilege to gather here for the 59th Plenary Assembly. To His Majesty King Mswati III; to the Parliament; to the Government; and to the people of Eswatini: thank you for your warmth, thank you for your generosity, and thank you for your steadfast contribution to the SADC regional integration agenda.

Our return carries a meaning all its own. Ten years ago, in June 2016, here in Ezulwini, this Forum adopted the SADC Model Law on Eradicating Child Marriage and Protecting Children Already in Marriage. Ten years on, we return to the very soil where that landmark law was born: to measure the distance travelled, and to recommit ourselves to the journey ahead. **Eswatini is not merely our host. Eswatini is part of our history.** And we say so with pride.

Eswatini is a Kingdom that leads. On 17 August 2026, at the SADC Summit, His Majesty King Mswati III was elected Chairperson of the SADC Organ on Politics, Defence and Security

Cooperation. This places Eswatini at the very heart of our region's work: for peace, for stability, for dialogue and for solidarity. We congratulate His Majesty, and we congratulate the Kingdom. This honour is well deserved, and the region's confidence rests in good hands.

Eswatini is a Kingdom that trades with its neighbours. According to the SADC Merchandise Trade Statistics Bulletin, 78.5 per cent of Eswatini's merchandise exports went to fellow SADC Member States in 2024. Let that figure speak for itself: nearly four out of every five exports stay within our region. For Eswatini, regional integration is not a slogan. It is a living, thriving partnership. From sugar to beverages, from textiles to agro-processing, and as a proud member of the SADC Free Trade Area, the Kingdom is helping to build our regional economy.

Hon Speaker, Members of Parliament,

Eswatini is a Kingdom that grows. The SADC Council singled out Eswatini among the countries that delivered strong growth in 2025. The World Bank confirms it: the economy grew by 4.8 per cent in 2025, up from 3 per cent the year before. The Central Bank of Eswatini reports merchandise exports of E44.1 billion in 2025, an increase of 3.6 per cent. These are not mere statistics. They are proud markers of a resilient economy, and a firm foundation for the next great task: creating more jobs for the people of Eswatini.

Eswatini is a Kingdom that builds institutions. It proudly hosts the SADC Aviation Safety Organisation, advancing cooperation for safer skies across our region. It has signed the Agreement on the

Operationalisation of the SADC Regional Development Fund, and has engaged its neighbours on how to capitalise it. And it has remitted approximately US$259,301 towards its 2025/26 assessed contribution to the SADC Humanitarian and Emergency Operations Centre. These are the deeds of a dependable partner. They remind us that integration is built on institutions, on shared financing, and on mutual responsibility.

Eswatini is a Kingdom that heals. In public health, Eswatini has written a chapter of global significance. The Kingdom was among the very first countries to reach the UNAIDS 95-95-95 HIV treatment targets, and it did so ahead of schedule. Behind this achievement stand sustained leadership, dedicated health workers, engaged communities and strong partnerships. The whole SADC family celebrates with you. And together, we remain resolute: prevention, especially for adolescent girls and young women, must continue.

Eswatini is a Kingdom that opens doors for women. We salute the Kingdom's Deputy Prime Minister: a woman in high office, and a former Chairperson of the Gender and Development Committee of the SADC Parliamentary Forum. SADC's 2025 figures record women holding 28 per cent of legislative positions and 26 per cent of executive positions. At ambassadorial level, women's representation rose from 20 per cent in 2024 to 25 per cent in 2025. These are solid foundations. Let us build on them, together, until gender parity in our region is no longer a goal, but a reality.

And Eswatini is a Kingdom that delivers. We celebrate the spirit of 'Nkwe!', so ably championed by His Majesty: a clarion call for delivery in record time. Cut the red tape. Shorten the delays. Simplify doing business. Make public services answer to citizens, entrepreneurs and investors. For all of us in SADC, Nkwe is a challenge worth embracing: regional integration must be felt not only in the agreements we sign, but in faster services, easier trade and better lives for our people.

Honourable Members, our congratulations are heartfelt, and they look forward. **Eswatini has given us every reason to be proud.** The finest tribute we can pay this Kingdom is to build on what it has achieved: to deepen trade among ourselves; to strengthen peace and security; to open wider doors for women and young people; and to turn the promises of our Model Laws into protection and opportunity in the daily lives of our people.

On behalf of this regional parliamentary family, I proudly congratulate the Kingdom of Eswatini on its distinguished contribution to SADC. To our gracious hosts: we thank you, most sincerely. And to the 59th Plenary Assembly: I wish you every success.

INTRODUCTION OF DELEGATES

Director of Ceremonies,

In line with the established practice of this august Plenary Assembly, allow me to inform our Guest of Honour and Distinguished Delegates that this 59th Plenary Assembly Session has drawn participation from the following countries. *I kindly request each delegation to rise as I mention your country, for the benefit of our Guest of Honour:*

1. The National Assembly of **Angola,** a Delegation of **five (5)** Members, led by **Hon. Pedro Sebastião**, Member of Parliament;

2. The Parliament of **the Republic of Botswana,** a Delegation of **six (6)** Members, led by *Honourable, Dithapelo Lefoko Keorapetse,* Speaker of the National Assembly.

3. The Parliament of the **Democratic Republic of Congo,** a delegation of **six (6)** Members led by *Honorable* ***Isaac Jean Calude TSHILUMBAYI MUSAWU,*** **1st Vice President of the National Assembly who is arriving this afternoon**.
   - Hon. Celestin Loleke Ekoto, MP is present

4. The Parliament of the **Kingdom of Eswatini**, a Delegation of **six (6)** Members, led by *Honorable Jabulani Mabuza,* Speaker of the House of Assembly our Host;

5. The Parliament of the **Kingdom of Lesotho**, a Delegation of **six (6)** Members led by *Hon. Tlohang Sekhamane*, Speaker of the National Assembly;

6. The Parliament of **the Republic of Madagascar**, a Delegation of **six (6)** Members led represented by *Honorable RANDRIANASOLONIAIKO Thierry Siteny,* Speaker of the National Assembly and President of the SADC Parliamentary Forum.

7. The Parliament of **the Republic of Malawi**, a Delegation of **six (6)** Members, led by the *Rt. Hon. Sameer Suleman*, Speaker of Parliament;

8. The Parliament of **the Republic of Mauritius,** a Delegation of **four (4)** Members, led by *Hon. Govinden Pynivel Venkatasami,* Deputy Chief Government Whip;

9. The Parliament of **the Republic of Mozambique**, a Delegation of **six (6)** Members, led by *Honorable* Helder Ernesto Injojo, First Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly;

10. The Parliament of **the Republic of Namibia**, a Delegation of **three (3)** Members, led by *Hon. Shaalukeni John Monde*, Member of Parliament.

11. The Parliament of **the Republic of South Africa**, a Delegation of **(6)** Members, led by *Hon. Thoko Didiza,* Speaker of the National Assembly;

12. The National Assembly of **the Republic of Zambia,** a Delegation of **five (5)** Members, led by *Hon. Nshamba Muzungu,* Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly;

13. The Parliament of **Zimbabwe**, a Delegation **of six (6)** Members, led by *Hon. Advocate Jacob Francis Nzwidamilimo Mudenda*, Speaker of the National Assembly;

14. The National Assembly of **the Republic of Seychelles,** represented by *Hon. Azarel Jolinda Ernesta,* Speaker of the National Assembly is attending Virtually.

a) **Clerks and Secretaries General** of Member Parliaments;

b) **The SADC Parliamentary Forum Secretariat,** a delegation of **thirteen (18)** staff Members, led by myself, the Secretary General.

c) Last but not least, all the staff from Member Parliaments and the Parliament of the Kingdom of Eswatini, our host;

WE HAVE REPRESENTATIVES FROM PARTNER ORGANISATIONS IN ATTENDANCE.

1. Ms Elisabeth Hårleman, Counsellor, Head of Regional Development Cooperation SRHR in Africa. Sweden

2. Mr Samuel Musyoki , Plan International Regional Director

3. Ms Antoinette Ngoma, Plan International, Country Director

4. Ms Sally Ncube , Equality Now
5. Ms Kudzai Meda, HIVOS

6. Ms. Anastacia Mugure Kamande, State Department of EAC Affairs

7. Ms. Mary Auma Maisory Mboya, State Department of EAC Affairs

8. Ms Letty Chiwara UNWOMEN

9. Ms Spiwe Dhlamini Equality Now

10. Ms. Santana Simiy Equality Now

11. Mr Bevis Kapaso Plan International

12. Mr Kelvin Mulenga, Plan International
13. Ms Loveness Mudzuri Survivor

All in all:

(i) **14** Parliaments are in attendance physically.

(ii) Out of **14** delegations: **11** are led by Presiding Officers, of which **9** are Speakers and 2 are Deputy Speakers. **5** delegations are lead by Members of Parliament, and of these;

(iii) **2** Parliaments are led by female Presiding Officers
9 are led by male Presiding Officers

(iv) **On Gender Representation:** Of the **75 Members** recorded in the credentials matrix, **26 (34.7%)** are women, underscoring the need for continued efforts towards achieving gender parity in regional parliamentary representation.

(v) Regarding political diversity, **46 (69.7%)** Members are from ruling parties, **15 (22.7%)** are from opposition parties, and **5 (7.6%)** are not affiliated with any political party. These include independent Members, traditional leaders (chiefs), and representatives from the Kingdom of Eswatini, which operates under a non-party political system.

Director of Ceremonies, Your Excellency, and Distinguished Delegates, permit me to conclude by expressing our profound gratitude to the Government and Parliament of the Kingdom of Eswatini, our gracious Host for warmly hosting the SADC Parliamentary Forum 59th Plenary Assembly Session in the cultural hub of Eswatini.

I wish all Distinguished Delegates fruitful deliberations.

I THANK YOU.