OPENING REMARKS

BY MS BOEMO M SEKGOMA,

SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE SADC PARLIAMENTARY FORUM

Commemoration of Ten Years of the SADC Model Law on Eradicating Child Marriage and Protecting Children Already in Marriage and Launch of the Regional Child Marriage Monitoring Dashboard

21st November 2026

Ezulwini Palazzo, Ezulwini, Kingdom of Eswatini

SALUTATION

The Deputy Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Eswatini,
Honourable Speakers of Parliament and Heads of Delegation,
Honourable Members of Parliament,
The President of the SADC Parliamentary Forum,
Dr Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda of UN Women, joining us virtually,
The Representatives of the Government of Sweden,
Representatives of Governments, the United Nations, civil society, development partners and the media,
Traditional and faith leaders, youth representatives and survivor advocates,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I will begin by extending a warm welcome to you all to this event commemorating ten years of the SADC Model Law on Eradicating Child Marriages and Protecting Children Already in Marriage. As some of you may be aware, the Model Law was adopted here in Ezulwini, on 3rd June 2016. A decade later, we are back in Eswatini, to take stock of what we have managed to achieve. Allow me to extend our appreciation to His Majesty, King Mswati III, a doyen of leadership, culture and tradition, who has given us grace to converge here in the beautiful Kingdom of Eswatini. It is only fitting that we do so on this soil, for no region will end child marriage without the custodians of culture and tradition standing firmly beside it.

Without taking much time, let me hasten to mention and remind Honourable Members that the model law we adopted did not have police, courts and a budget of its own. It was not designed to arrest anyone, fund a single service, nor keep a single girl in school. Instead, it prescribed and proscribed measures that Member States could adopt and adapt in their domestic laws, all in a bid to eradicate child marriages. It therefore behoved all of us, to put shoulder to the wheel, mindful that everything it was set to achieve, would be done through our collective and concerted efforts, or it will not be done at all.

It is precisely for this reason that this afternoon matters. The question before us is not whether the Model Law is a good law. The region settled that ten years ago. The question is whether we, who adopted it with such conviction, have since behaved like people who meant it. In noting this, I call to mind the words of Honourable Innocent Gonese, in his Joint Sitting Report to the 39th Plenary Assembly, cautioned that,

'the law alone, will not be able to eliminate the problem. However, I want to submit that this is a foundation and urge all hon. Members that you cannot build a house without first laying the foundation. However, you can have a foundation without a house. If you decide to build a house without a foundation, that house will collapse.'

A decade later, here in Ezulwini, we must ask ourselves, 'Where is the house?' Where is the house if children continue to be married? Where is the house if we do not allocate and disburse adequate resources towards protection of survivors of child marriage? Where is the house

if we continue to have exceptions when we committed, through the model law that the age of marriage is 18? So, why then did we lay that foundation?

Deputy Prime Minister, Honourable Members,

This is also why we are launching the Regional Child Marriage Monitoring Dashboard, and why I ask you to understand it correctly. The Dashboard is a mirror. It will show this region to itself, without flattery. It will reward the Parliaments that have acted, and it will embarrass those that have not. It will reveal where our own institution, the Secretariat included, must do better. That is its purpose, and that is its price.

Equally instructive is the theme,*"From landmark law to measurable protection: political leadership, progressive culture and data for the eradication of child marriage."* It connotes that political leadership, progressive culture and data are the three levers that should turn if we are going to record tangible results from the Model law. Therefore, it is prominently axiomatic that we remain alive to these interlinkages wherein political leadership decides whether a law is enforced and funded. Progressive culture decides whether it is embraced in the home, the chiefdom and the congregation and data tells us whether any of it is working. After all, leadership without culture legislates into an echo and the opposite is true, for culture without leadership remains a conversation. And both, without data, cannot tell activity from impact. That is why survivors, young people, and traditional and faith leaders are in this room alongside legislators.

Deputy Prime Minister, Honourable Members,

Honourable Members, the Forum is on a path of transformation, and a regional Parliament will be known by what it insists upon. So let me ask three things of you, to speak plainly, commit specifically and return to your Parliaments prepared to be asked what became of what you said here. If we do this, we will have used this afternoon for what it was made for. I wish you all a very productive afternoon and join me in welcoming our Host, and Speaker of the House of Assembly, Honourable J.C. Mabuza. You will agree with me that he is a man who knows, from daily practice, how hard it is to translate a regional commitment into national reality.

He has also ....



PROFILE FOR THE HONOURABLE SPEAKER OF THE ESWATINI PARLIAMENT – HONOURABLE JABULANI CLEMENT MABUZA

Honorable Jabulani C. Mabuza is the Speaker of the House of Assembly of the 12th Parliament of the Kingdom of Eswatini and an Electorate Member of the 12th Parliament from the Pigg's Peak Constituency in the Hhohho Region.

He was born on 22nd July, 1972 in Hosea, in the Shiselweni Region. He completed his O'Level at Evelyn Baring High School in 1994. He is currently pursuing his Master's in Business Administration and also holds a Diploma in Human Resource Development from the Institute of Commercial Management. He is married to Ntomfuthi Mabuza.

Hon. Mabuza is a Christian and committed member of the Free Evangelical Assemblies Church (Pigg's Peak branch), an affiliate of Conference of Churches. In his early years, after completing his O'level, he worked for different companies, which includes, Skonkwane Stores where he served at managerial level. Working for these different companies made him to understand business better, because in 1998 he received recognition as the most improved Manager for determination, dedication and achievements. Again in 2002, he received recognition of being Franchisee of the year.

In 2003, Hon. Mabuza started his own business - Buy Cash Hardware in Piggs Peak which has grown steadily and currently has twenty-one (26) branches around the country with two Outlets selling tyres. His businesses currently employs over 600 Swazis.

Over the years, he became very popular in his community because of his contribution towards helping the less privileged and elderly and also because of his businesses. Due to his fame among the members of his constituency, he was approached to enter for the 2013 Elections to represent the Piggs Peak Inkhundla (constituency) where he eventually won. Following his victory, he was honored by the country's leadership who appointed him as the Minister of Tourism and Environmental Affairs from 2013 to October 2016. From October 2016 to 2018, he served as the Minister for Commerce, Industry and Trade. In 2018, he was re-elected by the people of Pigg's Peak Constituency and again the country's leadership appointed him as the Minister of Agriculture from 2018 to 2023. In 2023 he was re-elected as the Member of Parliament for Pigg's Peak Constituency and now serves as the Speaker of the 12th Parliament of the Kingdom of Eswatini.

I thank you.

Kealoboga

Ngiyabonga,

Muito Obrigado,

Merci Beaucoup