VOTE OF THANKS

BY HON. SPEAKER AZAREL ERNESTA

SPEAKER OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF SEYCHELLES

DURING THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE 59TH PLENARY ASSEMBLY OF THE SADC PARLIAMENTARY FORUM

HOSTED BY THE PARLIAMENT OF THE KINGDOM OF ESWATINI

EZULWINI, ESWATINI,

21 NOVEMBER 2026

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

Honourable President, Honourable Speakers, Honourable Members of Parliament, distinguished delegates and colleagues,

Allow me to express my sincere appreciation to every Member of Parliament for the thoughtful deliberations and, most importantly, for taking this important step forward.

Today, you have done more than consider and endorse a policy. You have helped restore confidence in the right of every individual to participate in parliamentary work without fear, intimidation or harassment. You have affirmed that dignity and safety are not privileges reserved for those who hold power; they are rights that belong to everyone.

I see a future in which a Member of Parliament, a staff member, a delegate or a visitor can attend a meeting of this Forum knowing that they are protected, respected and able to contribute freely. That is the institutional legacy we begin to build today. We join many other institutions and legislatures around the world that have recognised that ethical leadership must be demonstrated through action.

I also wish, on behalf of the Forum, to place on record our profound appreciation to the **Government of Sweden** for its partnership with the SADC Parliamentary Forum and its contribution to advancing important institutional policies such as this one. We thank Sweden for its investment in governance, human rights, accountability and the strengthening of democratic institutions. This is among the most

valuable investments a development partner can make in a regional organisation: an investment not merely in structures, but in the dignity, protection and rights of people. We recognise and deeply appreciate Sweden's contribution to this important work.

As we look ahead to the Plenary Assembly, I encourage each Member Parliament to consider making a statement of solidarity in support of this commitment. More importantly, I invite every country to commit to domesticating the principles and provisions of this regional policy within its own Parliament, through appropriate national policies and mechanisms. We want this commitment to be visible not only at the regional level, but in every Parliament across our SADC family.

I also encourage Member Parliaments to consider volunteering suitably qualified judicial officers to support the grievance or tribunal mechanism envisaged under the policy, so that we can establish a process that is credible, independent and trusted.

Honourable Members, thank you for demonstrating that this Forum is prepared to lead by example. Let this not be a policy that is adopted and left on paper. Let it become a standard that is lived, implemented and reflected in the experience of every person who enters our institution.

Thank you for taking this step forward. Together, we are building a parliamentary community where power is exercised with responsibility, rights are protected, and dignity is non-negotiable.