

Republic of Botswana

STATEMENT BY HON. DITHAPELO L. KEORAPETSE, MP SPEAKER OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF BOTSWANA

ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

22ND NOVEMBER 2026

KINGDOM OF ESWATINI

SALUTATIONS:

- The outgoing President, Hon. RANDRIANASOLONIAIKO Siteny Thierry,
- The outgoing Vice President Hon. Sylvia Elizabeth Lucas Izaks,
- The Elected Vice President, Hon
- Speakers here present,
- The SADC PF Secretary General, Her Excellency Boemo Sekgoma
- Your Excellencies,
- Honourable Members of Parliament,
- Distinguished delegates and SADC PF Partners,
- Ladies and Gentlemen,

I greet you all.

Opening Remarks

1. Let me begin on a humble note by expressing my gratitude to God Almighty for this wonderful day, and thank Him for the precious gift of life, for His unfailing love, and for His grace and mercy.

2. Allow me to express my profound gratitude to the outgoing President of this Forum, Honourable Speaker Thierry for steady stewardship, dedication, and the strong foundation you leave behind.

3. I stand before you deeply honoured by the confidence you have placed in me to serve as President of the SADC Parliamentary Forum.

I accept this mandate with profound gratitude, a deep sense of duty, and a clear-eyed appreciation of the historic journey ahead of us.

TEN YEARS SINCE ESWATINI

4. Honourable Members, allow me a moment of personal reflection. Ten years ago, in 2016, this Forum met here in Eswatini to adopt the SADC Model Law on Eradicating Child Marriage and Protecting Children Already in Marriage. Among those in attendance were two opposition Members of Parliament from Botswana, one of them the Leader of the Opposition. Today, one of them is the President of the Republic of Botswana, and the other stands before you as Speaker of the National Assembly of Botswana, and now as President of this Forum. This is an interesting trajectory, a memorable but inexplicable journey. We thank the Lord, may He continue to surprise us.

5. Ours is not the only such story. Other former Members of this Forum have gone on to become Heads of State, as in the Seychelles, while others have become Speakers and Ministers across our region. This Forum has truly been a nursery of leadership for Southern Africa. So, to the young and vibrant generation of Members in this room: please take heart.

6. For me, I can only hope to return to Eswatini ten years from now, in yet another capacity!

OUR JOURNEY SINCE 1997

7. When our Forum was established in 1997, SADC led the continent as the first Regional Economic Community to create an association of Parliaments. We anchored ourselves on a simple truth: regional

integration cannot belong to governments alone; it must belong to the people – our people – our ultimate bosses.

8. Yet, over decades, other regions have overtaken us. Four regional communities in Africa have since established parliamentary institutions: the ECOWAS Parliament (in 2000), the East African Legislative Assembly (in 2001), the Network of Parliamentarians of the Economic Community of Central African States (in 2002), and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development's (IGAD) Inter-Parliamentary Union (in 2023) - leaving SADC as the only Regional Economic Community of the African Union without a regional parliament!

   In the very year our Forum was founded, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere reminded us that ***"Unity will not make us rich, but it can make it difficult for Africa and the African peoples to be disregarded and humiliated."*** A regional parliament is how Southern Africa's people will make their voice heard.

9. We must also speak with candour about our internal challenges. Across our region, the domestication of regional commitments and Model Laws remains uneven, while resource limits and capacity gaps have too often slowed our momentum and constrained our intensity of innovation and planning, and delivery. But we must not, and cannot let these realities diminish our proud legacy! Instead, let them strengthen our resolve!

TOWARDS A SADC PARLIAMENT

10. Distinguished colleagues, we are now entering a defining chapter. With the Agreement Amending the SADC Treaty in force, the legal

foundation for a SADC Parliament is laid. The task before us now is to transform that milestone into a functional, credible institution. Crucially, establishing this Parliament provides the final piece, the indispensable third leg, to our regional governance architecture, alongside an active executive and judiciary, and to drive our region's integration and development, in the quest of bridging the gap between citizens and policymakers.

11. Our journey Towards a SADC Parliament will be guided by four priorities, drawn from the Forum's own Model Laws and principles.

12. **First, Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation and Diplomacy.** I will work to deepen cooperation among our Member Parliaments and to strengthen the Forum's partnerships with sister institutions across the continent and beyond, including the Pan African Parliament and the Inter-Parliamentary Union, so that the voice of Southern Africa's Parliaments is heard where it matters.

13. **Second, Human Rights and the Rule of Law.** Constitutionalism, good governance and effective parliamentary oversight are the bedrock of accountable government. We must continue to strengthen oversight and accountability, including the independence of Public Accounts Committees across our region.

14. **Third, Electoral Democracy.** Credible elections are the foundation of legitimate government. We will continue to promote adherence to SADC principles and guidelines on democratic elections and the domestication of the SADC PF Model Law on Elections.

15. **Fourth, Gender Equality and Human Development.** Ten years after we adopted the Model Law on Child Marriage here in Eswatini,

we must now move from commitment to measurable results, in ending child marriage and gender-based violence, and in advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights for women, men and children.

MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER

16. Above all, we must bring this institution closer to our people. This is non-negotiable in my view. Our people must know what we do, what we think and what they stand to benefit from their vote. Therefore, regional integration must mean more than protocols on paper. It must be felt in better livelihoods, real economic opportunities, lasting peace, and a shared sense of Southern African belonging.

17. No single President, and no single Member State, can carry this weight alone. As the wisdom of Ecclesiastes 4:9–10 reminds us: ***"Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labour."***

18. Honourable Members, our histories and constitutional traditions may vary, yet our destinies are bound together. Let us therefore move forward together, not merely to preserve the legacy of the SADC Parliamentary Forum, but to also fulfil the greater vision that inspired its founding.

19. I count on your esteemed support and guidance during the next two (2) years as we strive to exert all our efforts towards elevating our Region. Once again, I commit to work with you, and wish to thank you profusely for this vote of confidence in me, and my country.

Thank you.