



**SPEECH BY HONOURABLE NKHENSANI KATE BILANKULU, MP,
MEMBER OF THE SADC PF STANDING COMMITTEE ON
GENDER EQUALITY, WOMEN ADVANCEMENT AND YOUTH
DEVELOPMENT (GEWAYD) ON THE PUBLIC HEARING HELD
UNDER THE THEME “CONSOLIDATING DEMOCRACY BY
BRINGING PARLIAMENT TO THE PEOPLE” TO THE 52ND
PLENARY ASSEMBLY SESSION**

Mr President, I rise to support the Motion to adopt the Report of the Standing Committee on Gender Equality, Women Advancement and Youth Development so ably moved by the Chairperson, Honourable Shally Josepha Raymond, MP.

Mr President, it is disheartening to note, for example, that on any given day, twenty-eight children are violently attacked in South Africa; that three are murdered while another three survive attempted murder and, twenty-one suffer grievous bodily harm. Sadly, the situation is not very different in most of our Member States. As noted by the Chairperson, being exposed to different types of violence, be it physical, emotional, sexual or neglect, is painful and can be traumatic.

I, therefore, agree with the mover of this Motion that SADC Member States be urged to increase funding for child protection services and to organisations which solely operate to protect and safeguard children. Member States should further show seriousness to tackle violence against children by recognising that safeguarding children is everyone's business. They should, therefore, put measures in place to prevent and respond to violence against children across the region and transform attitudes and behaviours that allow it to persist.

Mr President, Comprehensive Sexuality Education empowers young people to protect and advocate for their health, well-being and dignity by providing them with the necessary toolkit of knowledge, attitudes and skills. Interestingly, research shows that the majority of adolescents lack the knowledge required to make sexual and reproductive decisions responsibly, leaving them vulnerable to coercion, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unintended pregnancy.

I, therefore, welcome the proposal by the mover to urge Member States to implement comprehensive sexuality education, both in schools and outside schools, through community-based training and outreach. States should promote policies for and investments in sexuality education programmes that meet internationally agreed standards.

In conclusion, Mr President, I wish to extend a special word of thanks to Ms Peggy Ruze, one of the SADC citizens who spoke about the stigma and discrimination she faced by society because of her HIV positive status. We have an obligation to stop stigma and discrimination by being intentional and thoughtful when choosing the words we use. Let us choose supportive rather than stigmatising language. The theme "*Equalize*" for World AIDS Day,

which fell on 1st December, 2022 was a call to action. It was a call to increase availability, quality and suitability of services, HIV treatment and testing and prevention, and a call to reform laws, policies and practices to tackle stigma and exclusion faced by people living with HIV. To Ms Peggy Ruze, I say thank you for your great courage. You are a great example to many others.

Mr President, I second the Motion.