



**SPEECH TO BE DELIVERED BY THE SECONDER OF THE MOTION FOR THE ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE HUMAN AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND SPECIAL PROGRAMMES COMMITTEE TO THE 52<sup>ND</sup> PLENARY ASSEMBLY SESSION OF THE SADC PARLIAMENTARY FORUM**

***Mr President,***

I rise to humbly second this very important motion. I wish to acknowledge from the onset the groundbreaking and sterling work which the Standing Committee on Human and Social Development and Special Programmes is doing in driving the agenda of eradicating malpractices in the sphere of human development. It is not in dispute that human assets are the most critical assets in the history and the future of humankind.

***Mr President,***

I fully associate myself with the eloquent speech of the mover of the motion. I do so cognisant of the challenges the region is facing in matters of access to health services and the promotion of SRHR. However, the challenges are not insurmountable. To begin with, I wish to highlight that millions of our children are dropping out of school each year owing to the prevailing macro-economic

environment characterised by surging costs of living. This exposes them to various dangers such as sexual abuse, as well as child marriage and its associated ills. As such, I am strongly appealing to governments to increase allocations to education so that we keep our children in schools longer. This not only protects the children, but also helps in developing their functional skills. To this end, I lend my unwavering support to the proposal that governments must allocate at least 20% of their total budget for the education sector.

***Mr. President,***

The Committee notes that corruption is frustrating the prosecution of persons charged with abuse of children and women. Corruption was singled out as one of the key factors compromising the procurement of contraceptives. Consequently, stock-outs of contraceptives are common in many countries. More alarming, we received submissions that in one country, defectives condoms were procured. This not only puts in danger the lives and health of unsuspecting users, but the reports also constitute a serious indictment on the abilities of parliaments to conduct oversight on government operations. In this regard, I call upon parliamentarians in the region to implement robust frameworks for arresting corruption, specifically in the health sector.

***Mr. President,***

I also wish to point out that we noted gaps at the regional level in respect of how we address matters relating to SRHR. At the SADC

level, it is worrying that, while the centrality of the SADC Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP 2020-2030) in guiding and directing regional integration and cooperation in SADC is well established, its Implementation Matrix is silent on implementation of SRHR. Notably, key indicators such as, *inter-alia*, reduction of new-born mortality rate, teen pregnancies and a reduction of maternal mortality ratio are not expressly captured by RISDP This compromises the delivery of the SRHR agenda.

In view of the foregoing, therefore, there is need to update and re-align RISDP so that it addresses matters of SRHR in detail. Reference to SRHR in the RISDP must be specific and not be couched in generalized linguistic formulations. SRHR issues must not be embedded and subsumed in other thematic areas such as nutrition, food security and poverty eradication.

***Mr President,***

Allow me to also briefly raise concern on the lack of awareness of laws relating to SRHR. The public hearing received submissions that communities did not understand and have access to the laws that relate to SRHR. This leads to ignorance of the law, often with devastating consequences. I believe governments must put in place strategies to ensure that laws are publicized adequately. Civil society organisations can play a key role in this endeavour. Laws must be positively marketed in widely circulating traditional print and emerging digital media spaces so that there is broader

awareness and acceptance of the same by society. Use of social media is key in raising awareness of child marriage, promoting access to contraceptives and reporting of abuse of children.

***Mr. President,***

Let me end by reiterating the Committee's position on the need to reform the laws in the region so that they respond effectively to the scourge of child marriage, corruption in the health sector and the need to provide a permissive environment for access to SRHR services, including safe abortions. Religious and legal impediments must not be used as a reason not to protect the health and lives of our children and citizens.

With these few words, Mr President, I beg to second the Motion.

I thank you.