



SPEECH BY THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE SADC OF STANDING COMMITTEE ON DEMOCRATISATION, GOVERNANCE AND HUMAN RIGHTS (DGHR) TABLING THE COMMITTEE REPORT TO THE 52ND PLENARY ASSEMBLY SESSION HOSTED BY THE PARLIAMENT OF THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO FROM 01 TO 11 DECEMBER 2022

Mr President, pursuant to its mandate in terms of Rule 42 (d) of the Rules of Procedure, the Standing Committee on Democratisation, Governance and Human Rights (DGHR) convened its meeting for the 52nd Plenary Assembly virtually on 25th November 2022, under the theme, “Consolidating Democracy by Bringing Parliament to the People”.

The Committee also considered various other matters including previous resolutions by the Committee and the Plenary Assembly and action taken; Consideration of citizen representations and Consideration of themes dealt with through partner presentations.

Mr President, before the establishment of the SADC Parliamentary Forum, there was no regional parliamentary mechanism to engage SADC MPs on matters of regional importance and for the MPs to, in turn, engage citizens and gather their view regarding regional matters.

Mr President, in line with the theme of the 52nd Plenary Assembly, it is pleasing to note that the SADC-PF has from inception, worked to promote cooperation between parliaments of SADC Member States. Over and above the furtherance of regional

integration, cooperation and diplomacy, SADC-PF has sought to harmonise the national interests of individual SADC Member States and the collective interests of the region. With the objective of “putting people first” and striving to address the needs and interests of SADC citizens, SADC-PF has from inception introduced various initiatives which promote citizen participation and engagement.

Mr President, over the years, the Forum has promoted continuous engagement between MPs and the citizenry at national level. For instance, SADC-PF has successfully collaborated with its Member Parliaments to create National Working Groups to bridge the communication gap between the citizenry and Parliament and provide a platform for citizens to share their concerns with MPs. In addition, the Forum has always promoted citizen participation through an open-door policy at the regional level to ensure that the voice of the SADC citizenry is heard either directly or through the representatives of the citizens. Furthermore, all Model Laws developed by the Forum are adopted following a consistent methodology which involves consultation with diverse stakeholders, including SADC citizens.

Mr President, the Forum has also consistently promoted the SADC identity, which refers to the identity of citizens as part of a geographical grouping with common interests and shared values. This is in line both with the foundational principle of a democracy which hinge on the will of the people expressed through a representative body such as Parliament.

Prior to the 52nd Plenary Assembly, the Standing Committee on Democracy, Governance and Human Rights of the Forum had arranged to hear citizen representations according to the thematic content of its mandate. Presentations were received from the following citizen representatives and partners:

- Laurence Andre, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Southern Africa
- Boniface Massah (Malawi), Rights violations for Persons with albinism, coordinated by Amnesty International Regional Office for Eastern and Southern Africa
- Mpho Tjope, Rights violations for Persons with Albinism, coordinated by Amnesty International Regional Office for Eastern and Southern Africa
- Joseph Dube, Director Disarmament and Arms Control (DAC) *Promoting the Domestication of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW)*
- Lethogonolo Letshele, Electoral Systems Researcher, My Vote Counts-South Africa
- Dean Mutata (Zimbabwe) – Youth Representative under SAT *YOUTH INCLUSION IN GOVERNANCE (WHY ARE YOU ALL SO OLD? – MPs: 55 – 19 citizens)*
- Visto Samisa, Pamoja Project Namibia
- Hlengiwe Dube, Centre for Human Rights-University of Pretoria
- Raymond Mazhambe (Zimbabwe) – Youth Representative under SAT *Why SADC needs to ride the data revolution & how young people can help*
- Chantelle De Sousa, Coordinator, Southern Africa Anti-Corruption Network
- Pusetso Morapedi, Director Platform to Protect Whistle Blowers in Africa, Southern Africa Office
- Andrianianina Ramanantoanina, Rary Aro Heroes
- Lukhanyo Sonyamba, Commissioner for Children, Western Cape Provincial Government

1.0 DELIBERATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1.1 Recommendations from public hearings:

In the ensuing deliberations from the public hearings with citizen representatives and partners, the SADC-PF Standing Committee on Democratisation, Governance and Human Rights:

- (i) **COGNISANT** of the need for Parliamentarians, as the elected representatives of the people, to continually interact with their constituents over the period of their electoral mandate, failing which there could be an asymmetry between citizen's aspirations and parliamentary action. Parliamentarians need to remain accessible to the electorate and to pledge allegiance to the people rather than their political parties in order for them to be held accountable. Such a disconnect could result in popular discontent which would pose a threat to peace, law, and social order.

- (ii) In furtherance of the objectives of democracy, **ENCOURAGING** SADC Member States to facilitate the independent scrutiny of voting and counting, including providing access to places of voting and tabulation of results. Electoral Management Bodies should be able to function independently and impartially, irrespective of their composition.

- (iii) **NOTING WITH CONCERN** that the voices of the youth and children are not particularly taken into consideration; although, policies, legislation, laws and structures do exist, whose implementation is inefficient.

- (iv) **NOTING WITH CONCERN** that although impressive progress has been made in mobile connectivity in Africa, investment in information technology systems is still lagging and Africa is yet to have universal, equitable, affordable and meaningful access to the internet.

NOW THEREFORE, the Committee recommends to the 52nd Plenary Assembly to:

- (v) **URGE** SADC Member States to keep or increase their efforts to respect, protect and fulfil all human rights for all groups and individuals within their jurisdictions and in particular to progressively recognize socio-economic rights. To this end, all SADC Member States are encouraged to ratify the United Nations Human Rights Treaty and fully engage with its related mechanisms.
- (vi) **UNDERSSCORE** the need for SADC Member States to address the adverse effects of climate change by putting human rights at the centre of their actions. In this regard, **IMPLORE** the Member States to adopt a holistic approach encompassing economic, social, cultural and political dimensions so as to empower the most affected groups and peoples.
- (vii) **IMPLORE** SADC Member States to adopt more transparent systems as a way of reducing the incidence of corruption. This would call for the creation of a safe and enabling environment and civic space within which people can express their views freely and without fear, online and offline, assemble peacefully, form associations and engage in the decision making processes. Furthermore, SADC Member States ought to put mechanisms in place to ensure that technocrats who work closely with politicians and who are often the engineers of corruption are kept accountable in order to nip the problem in the bud.
- (viii) **IN LIGHT OF THE ESCALATION** of corruption and impunity in SADC Member States, **URGE** Members of Parliament to use their mandate to hold the various institutions such as the Police, Prosecuting Authorities, Auditors-General, Ombudsman and Anti-Corruption

Agencies to account to Parliament on the measures they are taking to curb this trend.

- (ix) **URGE** SADC Member States to prioritise the adoption of laws for the protection of human rights defenders and whistle blowers as an anti- corruption tool. These laws should also ensure the engendering of a culture of whistle blowing as well as the protection of both former and potential whistle blowers.
- (x) **CALL UPON** SADC Member States to adopt change management strategies that would facilitate for the youth to lead in sectors such as Information Technology, Tourism and Sports. To this end, SADC Member States are urged to implement measures aimed at addressing the high level of youth unemployment which is responsible for youth exclusion by creating more jobs.
- (xi) **IMPLORE** SADC Member States to adopt and implement Youth Quota Systems accompanied by adult mentoring. This would be in line with the evidence gathered by the Inter Parliamentary Union report which confirms that with a well-designed Youth Quota System, youth participation will increase due to representation in government and parliamentary processes.
- (xii) **URGE** governments of SADC Member States to make use of Youth Indices that will provide further analysis to support data driven decision making and inputs into youth policy development. These proposals should suggest frameworks that integrate available demographic data with contextual considerations on young people's experiences. A good example of sharing data by governments is what happened during the COVID 19 period.

- (xiii) **COMMEND** the work that countries such as Malawi and Tanzania are doing in advocating for the protection of the rights of people with albinism. To this end, **IMPLORE** SADC Member States, in consultation with other stakeholders, to formulate a Model Law designed to protect people living with albinism.
- (xiv) **CALL UPON SADC** Member States to formulate National Action Plans on albinism in line with the AU Action Plan on Albinism. SADC Member States are further encouraged to recognise that albinism is not inability, and as such people with albinism ought to be given equal opportunities in an environment which allows them to participate fully. To this end, governments of SADC Member States are encouraged to manufacture and provide skin care products to their citizens living with albinism to protect them from skin cancer.
- (xv) **RESOLVE** to contribute to the deepening of youth participation by developing Model Laws designed to encourage youth absorption into positions of leadership and **DIRECT** the Forum's Secretariat to proceed accordingly.
- (xvi) **FURTHER RESOLVE** that the process of development of a SADC Model Law on data management be initiated and **DIRECT** the Forum's Secretariat to proceed accordingly.

2.0 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Committee notes that, although the SADC-PF has through its Standing Committees, consistently advocated for citizen participation and consultation, the convening of public hearings is a major milestone worthy of commendation. Through this initiative, the Forum has presented citizens across the region with an opportunity to voice out their concerns and interests outside the electoral cycle. Furthermore, the opportunity to interact with MPs from across the region is a rare opportunity

which will ensure that citizen's voices are infused into regional policy frameworks. Consequently, the SADC-PF will emerge as a true regional representative body reflecting the position of ordinary citizens from across the region.

The Committee wishes to place on record its thanks to all SADC citizens for honouring the invitation to participate in the public hearings, which had an impressive turnout and implore them to continue taking an interest in the work of the Committee and the Forum in general.

I so move Mr President.

Thank you.