



**SPEECH DELIVERED BY HONOURABLE SHALLY JOSEPHA RAYMOND, CHAIRPERSON 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 52<sup>ND</sup> PLENARY ASSEMBLY SESSION**

Mr President, I beg to move that this Plenary Assembly do adopt the Report of the Standing Committee on Gender Equality Women Advancement and Youth Development laid on the Table of the House on 5 December 2022

Mr President, pursuant to its terms of reference articulated under Rule 42(a) of the SADC PF Rules of Procedure, the Standing Committee on Gender Equality, Women Advancement and Youth Development (GEWAYD) held a one day public hearing under the theme “*Consolidating Democracy by Bringing Parliament to the People*” on Friday, 25<sup>th</sup> November, 2022.

The meeting focused on various thematic areas including, but not limited to, the protection of children against sexual abuse and gender-based violence at home and at work; why girls drop out of school; why women struggle to find employment; and how women are affected by practices such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

Mr President, the public hearing by the SADC Parliamentary Forum was opportune, coming as it did at a time when the transformation agenda had made so much headway. It was also a a unique undertaking because the engagement gave Members a great opportunity to directly interact with SADC citizens and their representatives in order to capture current and emerging issues which were topical.

Mr President, what was very inspirational about the hearing was the large number of young men and women who were enthusiastic to engage with their elected representatives on matters that highly impacted them on a daily basis. The Committee is of the considered view that actively engaging the youth in sustainable development efforts is critical to achieving sustainable, inclusive and stable societies.

Mr President, the Forum has over the years endeavoured to promote continuous engagement between Members of Parliament and citizens of the SADC region. This is because the Forum takes its role as the flagbearer for democratic governance in the region seriously. Therefore, the holding of public hearings, public awareness campaigns and roundtable meetings organized by the Forum on various topics of regional interest goes to the very core of the Forum's existence.

Mr President, I will now highlight some of the issues considered during the public hearing.

Firstly the Committee noted that children experienced violence in a wide variety of settings, ranging from home and school, to institutions and the judicial system. Being exposed to different types of violence, be it physical, emotional, sexual or neglect, is painful and can be traumatic. More importantly, such experiences in childhood have a strong association with future violence,

victimisation and perpetration, lower education attainment, health and social problems across a person's life.

Mr President, on the issue of gender discrimination in the work place, according to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), there are higher unemployment rates among young women than their male counterparts. The global percent stands at 18.6 per cent for young women and 10 percent for young men, respectively. The Committee was informed that some of the factors that hinder young women's access to the labour market are deeply entrenched in the social norms and values which act as barriers.

Mr President, the Committee heard that the lack of access to sanitary products due to financial constraints or "*period poverty*" and teenage pregnancies are some of the reasons why girls drop out of school. Other factors include religious and traditional beliefs that educating a girl child is a waste of resources.

Mr President, the Committee was dismayed to learn that 68 million girls are at risk of undergoing Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) by 2030. This practice involves a sequence of procedures carried out on the genitals of females of different ages, including the total or partial removal of the female external genitalia or other injuries to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.

A recent study has revealed that victims of FGM end up with psychological effects including depression, anxiety, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and loss of self-esteem. It also causes scar tissue and increases the risk of child-birth complications.

Mr president, against the background of the presentations received, the Committee on Gender Equality, Women Advancement and Youth Development, therefore, recommends to the 52<sup>nd</sup> Plenary Assembly to:

1. **APPEAL** to SADC Members States to increase funding for child protection services and to organisations which solely operate to protect and safeguard children.
2. **URGE** National Parliaments to strengthen preventive and positive disciplinary measures to curb violence in school, especially with regard to bullying.
3. **URGE** Member States to adopt comprehensive norms and standards to guide the provision of transportation for children with disabilities as they are among the most vulnerable groups in the region.
4. **ENCOURAGE** National Parliaments to reform legislation relating to children and create awareness through increased sensitisation of national laws. Enact legislation that criminalises the practice of getting children on the pretext of enrolling them in school and using them in domestic work; ban child marriage and abuse of children; and ban the

withdrawal of reported cases of sexual abuse and exploitation until they are heard by a competent court of law.

5. **APPEAL** to Member States to formulate policies and laws that eliminate the different hurdles that young women face when seeking employment.
6. **ENSURE** that Member States, in accordance with the 2030 Agenda, work tirelessly to eliminate the gender gaps that exist in the labour market by ensuring that young women access different commodities and services, especially loans and capital for entrepreneurship.
7. **URGE** Member States to support re-entry policies that seek to improve education opportunities for girls and young women who fall pregnant while in school.
8. **APPEAL** to Member States to consider heightening Comprehensive Sexuality Education programmes and Sexual Reproductive Health services in schools as this will contribute to the reduction of teenage pregnancy.
9. **APPEAL** to Member States to put appropriate programmes and policies in place to ensure that every girl child in school has access to free sanitary wear.
10. **URGE** Member States to formulate stiffer laws to govern how judicial systems in the region handle cases of sexual harassment and sexual exploitation and establish special courts to deal with cases of sexual exploitation in a fast track manner.

11. **ENCOURAGE** Member States to formulate programmes and associations that will train young women in entrepreneurial skills to enable them earn income for empowerment and increase development programmes for young women.
12. **URGE** Member States to be attentive to youth creativity and innovation. Member States should invest highly in technical vocational education and training (TVET) institutions.
13. **ENCOURAGE** Member States to enhance coordination and dialogue with different stakeholders such as civil society organisations (CSOs), women's rights organisations, the youth, especially adolescent girls for a unifying voice to end the practice of Female Genital Mutilation. Further **ENCOURAGE** Member States to collaborate very seriously with religious and traditional leaders on issues around Female Genital Mutilation.
14. **CALL UPON** Member States to continue raising awareness against discrimination and stigma against people living with HIV/AIDS.

Mr President, in conclusion, I wish to express profound gratitude to the Secretary General and her team for the guidance and support rendered to the Committee during the public hearing. Most sincerely, Mr President, I wish to thank the SADC citizens for interacting with the Committee.

**Mr President, I beg to move.**