

**All protocol observed as established by the master of ceremony****Guest of Honour and Distinguished Delegates,**

It is a great honour, and I feel privileged, to stand before you to deliver a statement on behalf of the Regional Women's Parliamentary Caucus on this auspicious occasion.

It is gratifying to note that over time, some strides have been recorded towards gender equality and women empowerment in our region.

But it remains true that we are not yet there and the challenges are many and progress is very slow.

The shortcomings are seen in many areas, education, employment finance, business, politics and so on.

The statistics bear witness to these realities.

Yet we have come to realise that investing in girls' education and training has clear and concrete social and economic benefits.

To move forward, various policy interventions must be put in place to tackle gender imbalances. We must improve conditions for young women to engage in all spheres of economic activity while we also tackle violence against women and girls, child care options, legal and

financial norms. But most important of all is overcoming traditional perceptions of the role of women in societies across our region.

### **Guest of Honour and Distinguished Delegates**

The theme of the 54<sup>th</sup> Plenary Assembly is appropriate in our current circumstances, given that Southern Africa is among the most vulnerable regions in the world to frequent and catastrophic disasters.

It is encouraging to note that SADC has adopted the Gender-Responsive Disaster Risk Reduction Strategic Plan and Plan of Action (2020-2030).

In so doing, SADC recognised that the severity of the impacts of extreme and non-extreme weather and climate events depends strongly on the exposure to these events and the levels of vulnerability.

Climate change affects all people but not equally, because in any given climate crisis, women and girls experience its greatest impacts, which are amplified by pre-existing gender inequalities.

The consequences of climate disasters are an increased burden for women and girls,

In this regard, regional efforts to improve capacity for gender-responsive risk reduction are of critical importance.

**The SADC Gender-Responsive Disaster Risk Reduction Strategic Plan and Plan of Action** is a critical statement that we need to keep in the forefront of our deliberations.

It recognises that a regional approach is justifiable because disasters do not necessarily respect territorial boundaries.

**However,** action at national level is also key.

We must galvanise our efforts to collect information about these disasters and disseminate it among multiple stakeholders and strengthen coordination mechanisms between institutional and legislative frameworks.

Additionally, full and effective implementation of disaster management frameworks calls for increased funding.

I am, therefore, encouraged that this Plenary Assembly will provide a platform for the parliamentarians of SADC to focus on the key challenge of climate change and its impact facing our region. I am confident that the resolutions from this important engagement will go a long way towards ensuring that SADC Member States are better prepared to manage and mitigate the disasters that occur in their respective jurisdictions and across the entire region.

**Guest of Honour and Distinguished delegates**

The world will commemorate the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women on 25<sup>th</sup> November 2023. This commemoration will also mark the launch of the UNITE! campaign which will run until 10<sup>th</sup> December.

It means 16 days of activism concluding on the day that commemorates the International Human Rights Day (10<sup>th</sup> December).

In light of this, I call on each SADC Parliamentarian to rededicate themselves to taking action to create a SADC free from violence against women and girls.

Allow me to end with a brief note on the history of women's rights in Mauritius, our host country. Beginning with adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Mauritius has made steady progress in addressing women's issues relating to education, poverty, economic empowerment, legal measures, violence against women, and the environment.

Mauritius adopted a National Gender Policy (2008) to mainstream gender in all sectoral policies.

This has triggered significant changes in the situation of Mauritius in relation to Gender Equality. However, concerns around gender-based violence and unequal opportunities in employment still persist.

I will stop here and simply say much impressive progress has been recorded, but much still' needs to be done as in other SADC countries, if SDG 5 is to be achieved as part of the 2030 Agenda.

**I thank you.**