



**STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE
REGIONAL WOMEN'S PARLIAMENTARY
CAUCUS (RWPC), HON. SHALLY JOSEPHA
RAYMOND ON THE OCCASION OF THE
OFFICIAL OPENING CEREMONY FOR THE 55TH
PLENARY ASSEMBLY HOSTED BY THE
PARLIAMENT OF ANGOLA IN LUANDA, ANGOLA**

SALUTATIONS

It is a profound honour and privilege to address this important gathering today on behalf of all the women parliamentarians of the SADC region, in this beautiful country, in my capacity as the Chairperson of the Regional Women's Parliamentary Caucus (RWPC).

Commending SADC PF's Efforts

As the saying goes, charity begins at home. In this regard, I wish to applaud the SADC PF for its sterling work in promoting gender equality in the SADC region through various initiatives. The creation of the RWPC as an organ with the mandate to promote women's political participation and the opportunity for the Caucus to address Plenary Assembly Sessions, as I am doing today, clearly demonstrate that commitment.

The RWPC and their national chapters, the National Women's Parliamentary Caucuses (NWPCs), have proven to be strategic platforms for advocating gender equality. They have empowered women parliamentarians to champion gender-sensitive policies and the prioritisation of women's issues on parliamentary agendas.

However, I am aware that in some member parliaments, NWPCs either do not exist or are struggling to make an impact for various reasons. Therefore, I urge SADC PF to prioritise the strengthening of these Caucuses, so they become effective components of the gender machinery at the national level and assist legislatures in their efforts to build gender-sensitive Parliaments.

Celebrating Strides Toward Gender Equality

On behalf of the RWPC, I wish to acknowledge the remarkable strides made by SADC Member States in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment. We have witnessed laudable achievements, including the appointment of women to the highest echelons of leadership. Member States like my own country, Tanzania, have set commendable examples with the appointment of a woman as President, Her Excellency Samia Suluhu Hassan.

Many other countries, including our very own host Angola, have appointed women as Vice Presidents, Ministers and Judges. In addition, we have seen a significant increase in the election of women Parliamentarians across the region, including as Speakers of Parliament. These developments signify a transformative shift in our societies, reflecting our collective commitment to gender parity and the empowerment of women in all spheres of life.

Legislative measures, including the implementation of voluntary and statutory quotas, have substantially contributed to these advancements. We also have some Member States that have made notable progress towards closing the gender pay gap through rigorous policy and related measures.

However, while we celebrate these achievements, we must also acknowledge the need for more to be done for accelerated action to achieve gender equality in line with SDG 5. The SADC Protocol on Gender and Development provides us with a robust framework, particularly in Article 12, which calls for equal representation of women in decision-making positions, and Article 20, which emphasises the elimination of gender-based violence.

I urge Member States to seize the opportunities presented by the increased electoral activities in 2024 to adopt more inclusive electoral systems that facilitate the attainment of gender equality. Linking access to public funding for political parties to their gender equality policies and practices is one way to ensure commitment and accountability.

We must also combat gender-based violence and cyber-violence targeting women candidates and support our governments to addressing the vulnerabilities faced by women and girls who disproportionately experience inequality, unemployment and poverty. In this regard, we should advocate for awareness and implementation of Model Laws such as the one on Gender-Based

Violence and the Public Financial Management to assist in addressing these challenges at national levels.

Addressing Climate Change with a Gender Perspective

Climate change continues to pose significant challenges in our region. It is crucial that as our governments respond to build resilience, the mitigation and adaptation measures are gender sensitive. Women are often the worst affected by climate-related disasters, as evidenced by the current El Niño-induced droughts affecting several SADC Member States. Parliaments should take proactive steps to ensure that women are not disproportionately affected and that they have a voice in climate-related decision-making processes.

Promoting Access to Education by Women and Girls

In view of the African Union's theme for this year, 'Education: Breaking Down Barriers, Building African Futures,' I wish to reiterate that education is not only a fundamental right but also an enabler for other rights for women and girls. Accordingly, I urge all Parliamentarians to utilise their legislative, oversight and budgetary functions to ensure access to quality education for all women and girls.

Gender Dimensions of Renewable Energy Policies

In light of the Plenary Assembly theme, 'The Role of Parliaments in Promoting Renewable Energy Policies in the SADC Region and Creating a Single Regional Energy Market,' I would like to remind

this gathering that, women especially in rural areas, often are the primary energy managers in their households. Ensuring access to renewable energy can greatly enhance their quality of life and economic opportunities. I urge our Parliaments to take proactive steps in integrating gender perspectives into renewable energy policies and initiatives.

A Personal Call to Action

As I conclude, I challenge each of us to make gender equality a personal agenda. Gender equality is not just a women's issue; it is a societal imperative that demands the commitment and action of everyone.

Thank you.

Asante Sana.

Obrigado.