SOLIDARITY STATEMENT

BY

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On the Occasion of the 57th Plenary Assembly Session of the SADC Parliamentary Forum

Theme: "Harnessing Artificial Intelligence (AI) for effective and efficient Parliamentary processes in the SADC Region: Experiences, Challenges and Opportunities"

Hosted By

The Parliament of the Republic of Zimbabwe

Victoria Falls Town

2nd June 2025

Thank you Director of Ceremonies

Your Excellency, Dr. Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa, President of the Republic of Zimbabwe and Chairman of SADC and our gracious Guest of Honor;

Distinguished Delegates, Invited Guests, ladies and Gentlemen.

Allow me to stand on the salutations and protocols that have been duly established by Dignitaries that have spoken before me.

A refreshing morning to you all.

It is an honour and privilege to deliver solidarity remarks on the **57ᵗʰ Plenary Assembly Session of the SADC Parliamentary Forum** being held today here in at the Elephant Hills Resort in the beautiful Victoria Falls Town of the Republic of Zimbabwe. I am very pleased to bring you greetings from H.E. Mr. Elias Magosi, the SADC Executive Secretary, who due to other commitments could not make it.

Your Excellency, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen

The emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is resulting in global transformation driven by the popularity of Large Language Model (LLMs) such as DeepSeek and ChatGPT highly popularized by International and Global Media platforms. The power of AI to transform Parliamentary Processes across the SADC Region remains huge and cannot be understated. The integration of AI in legislative functions can revolutionize Parliaments, strengthening democratic governance, enhance legislative efficiency, transparency and citizen engagement, and ensure more informed decision-making. We support and encourage developments in that regard.

This auspicious event's theme which is: "**Harnessing Artificial Intelligence (AI) for effective and efficient Parliamentary processes in the SADC Region: Experiences, Challenges and Opportunities**" is therefore very befitting and timely.

Whilst on the global level, AI is presenting many opportunities and potential benefits for sustainable, socio-economic development, including potential contribution to the attainment of the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the African Union (AU) Agenda 2063 (Towards the Africa we want), AI is seen as a double-edged sword that is changing the world at an unprecedented pace. AI also presents various **Challenges** and **Risks** ranging from potential bias particularly, as these models lack the African social and cultural contexts, potential discrimination of women and vulnerable persons, job displacement, liability issues due to AI undertaking human operations, disinformation, data privacy concerns, surveillance, copyright concerns and cybersecurity risks, to name a few.

This calls for **Ethical Usage of AI** for the realization its opportunities, whilst mitigating its risks. In line with the theme, SADC Parliamentarians and Legal Experts are further encouraged to deliberate, share experiences, engage AI Experts and explore how to harness and exploit AI opportunities in their parliamentary processes, whilst ensuring that AI adoption is undertaken in a safe and ethical manner.

Your Excellency, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen
As your Secretariat, we respectfully recognize the ***The African Union (AU)Continental AI Strategy: Harnessing AI for Africa's Development and Prosperity*** that was adopted in July 2024. This **Continental AI Strategy** provides a framework for building a harmonized, ethical, and inclusive AI ecosystem across Africa. It emphasizes the need for homegrown AI solutions that reflect African values, empowers citizens, and drives economic and social

progress. The strategy proposes a people-centric, development-oriented and inclusive approach. It also highlights the need to accelerate Member States' capabilities in Infrastructure, AI talent and skills, datasets, innovation and research.

Your Excellency, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen

At the regional level, the SADC Regional Indicative Strategic Development Master Plan (RISDP) 2020-2030 notes that **Technological Revolution and Innovation** as well as the **deployment of innovative 4th Industrial Revolution (4IR) and AI-related technologies** are an opportunity that also speaks to the need for appropriate skills, including digital literacy across the region.

Furthermore, the **SADC Digital Transformation Strategy,** approved by the SADC Council of Ministers in August 2023 is a cross-cutting and multi-sectoral strategy that aims to transform the region into an inclusive digital economy through adoption of digital technologies, including AI. This includes pilot projects in AI, digital infrastructure and improved digital skills.

In 2022, the Southern Africa sub-Regional Forum on AI convened in Windhoek, Republic of Namibia and adopted the **Windhoek Statement on Artificial Intelligence** which recognizes that AI is fast transforming the world and the future of humanity, at the same time raising complex questions, and blurring traditional boundaries. We stand for positive development and ethical use of AI in Southern Africa.

At the SADC Secretariat, we are planning to embark on the development of the **SADC Regional Artificial Intelligence (AI) Model Policy and Regulatory Framework**. This instrument will be aligned to the global and continental frameworks and will enable a harmonized regional approach to the deployment of AI in the SADC Region.

In June 2023, SADC Ministers responsible for Education and Training, Science, Technology and Innovation made the following decision: **Decision 6: Update of the Research Ethics Guidelines and Ethics of AI** and directed SADC Secretariat to work in partnership with UNESCO and Regional Experts to develop regional guidelines on the Ethics of AI and develop a regional programme of action on AI, which will be implemented with support from International Cooperating Partners and private sector. This work has already commenced.

Your Excellency, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen

I am happy to note that in the SADC Region, six-country pilot projects have already been undertaken in the Republics of **Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe** through support from UNESCO. These projects seek to gauge Member States' readiness on AI development, applications and systems. These pilot projects and their respective country reports include policy recommendations across five (5) thematic areas identified by UNESCO, namely:

i. Legal and Regulatory;
ii. Social and Cultural;
iii. Scientific and Educational;
iv. Economic; and
v. Technological and Infrastructural dimensions.

I urge Delegates to read these reports which will be available on **UNESCO's AI Ethics Global Observatory**.

Your Excellency, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen

I encourage all Delegates to participate and contribute actively to the deliberations during this event. Actively explore the potential use, cases, and applications of AI in parliamentary processes to enhance efficiency and service delivery to SADC Citizens. Your

insights will shape the future of AI in Parliamentary processes across the region and ensure that the SADC Region is not left behind. Let us also benchmark against international best practices and case studies where possible.

In closing, allow me to say that for all the plans and visions we have around AI, the Secretariat stands ready to collaborate with you in mobilizing innovative financing for the vision to materialize, given the recent developments of the global financial platform.

With these remarks, I would like to thank you, Your Excellency and **the Government of Zimbabwe** for hosting this assembly which also resonates very well with the SADC Regional Agenda. I also thank the **SADC Parliamentary Forum** and all other **parties** that have contributed to this event. We look forward to fruitful engagements on AI in Parliamentary processes.

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Muito Obrigado,

Merci Beaucoup,

Asante Sana,

Tatenda,

Siyabonga,

and

Thank you so much for your kind attention.

2nd June 2025

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