



**OPENING REMARKS BY THE MINISTER OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND
COOPERATION AND CHAIRPERSON
OF THE SADC COUNCIL OF MINISTERS,
HONOURABLE RONALD LAMOLA
ON
THE OCCASION OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS MEETING
12 March 2026
PRETORIA, REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

Honourable Professor Amon Murwira, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Trade of the Republic of Zimbabwe, and Outgoing Chairperson of the SADC Council of Ministers,

Honourable Mulambo Haimbe, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Zambia and Interim Incoming Chairperson of the SADC Council of Ministers,

Honourable Ministers and Heads of Delegations,

Your Excellency, Mr. Elias Mpedi Magosi, Executive Secretary of SADC,

The Chairperson of the Standing Committee of Senior Officials, Ambassador Tebogo Seokolo

SADC Deputy Executive Secretaries,

Senior Officials and Experts from Member States,

SADC Secretariat Staff,

Members of the media,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning!

I warmly welcome you to this regular session of the Council of Ministers of the Southern African Development Community.

I hope that your travel to our country was smooth and wish you a pleasant stay here in South Africa.

I believe that the Senior Officials have worked tirelessly over the past few days in preparation for this session. I convey our deep appreciation for their sterling work.

We also extend our gratitude to the Executive Secretary and the Secretariat for all the administrative and strategic support provided throughout these meetings.

Distinguished Colleagues,

We meet at a time of growing economic and geopolitical complexity and uncertainty. The international system is marked by heightened geopolitical tensions, economic volatility, climate-induced shocks and disruptions to global supply chains.

These pressures are compounded by growing threats to territorial integrity and the sovereign equality of all nations.

At the same time, geopolitics and geo-economics have become increasingly intertwined, with trade, technology, finance, food security, energy security and climate policy all being used as instruments of strategic competition.

Colleagues,

It is in this context that the theme adopted for the 45th SADC Summit in Madagascar in August 2025, '*Advancing Industrialisation, Agricultural Transformation and Energy Transition for a Resilient SADC*', is both timely and relevant. The resilience of our region, and indeed of our continent, is once again being tested by developments beyond our borders.

The current geopolitical climate, including the United States and Israel's war on Iran and Iran's retaliation, is already sending shockwaves through our societies. Beyond the immediate impact of rising global oil prices, a spike in fertiliser costs is set to drive food prices up and further compromise food security across many of our countries. As a community, we will not emerge unscathed from this. Our public finances are likely to come under even greater strain, and it is our people who will bear the cost.

There is also a growing concern that Gulf states may reassess overseas investments in infrastructure, critical minerals, energy and technology as their priorities shift towards internal defence and security considerations.

This could carry consequences for investment flows, growth prospects and development finance across our region.

Our region is facing these external shocks while already carrying a heavy debt burden.

Indeed, the African Leaders' Debt Relief Initiative has described the present moment as the worst debt crisis in 80 years.

Today, more than 750 million Africans live in countries that spend more on debt servicing than on health or education.

In too many cases in our region, spending on interest payments far exceeds investment in schools, hospitals and other social priorities.

While we have used multilateral platforms and global partnerships to draw attention to these pressures and advocate concrete solutions, conflict on this scale can put the brakes on these efforts.

It is no exaggeration to say that it threatens to deepen our vulnerabilities and further delay our development ambitions.

These setbacks come just as many of our economies are beginning to recover from the after-effects of the Covid pandemic and the disruptions associated with Russia-Ukraine war.

These developments raise two major questions for this Council.

- What does it mean to pursue the vision for a resilient SADC in the face of these realities?
- What strategies can we use to insulate ourselves and protect our economies and the more than 380 million people of our region from these shocks?

Distinguished Colleagues

My intention in setting out this context is not to lull us into pessimism. On the contrary, I believe these realities make the case for regional cooperation and integration even more urgent.

They also reinforce the urgency of implementing the commitments undertaken under SADC Vision 2050, which seeks to build a peaceful, inclusive, competitive and high-income industrialised region where citizens enjoy sustainable economic well-being, justice and freedom.

Honourable Ministers,

Citizens across Southern Africa expect regional cooperation to make a tangible difference to livelihoods, jobs, food security, energy access and resilience.

Meeting those expectations requires institutions that function effectively and Member States that give legal and practical effect to the commitments we have undertaken.

This includes strengthening resource mobilisation efforts, ratifying and giving effect to legal instruments that support regional cooperation, honouring commitments made with development partners, and leveraging the opportunities that arise from strategic partnerships.

Colleagues,

The agenda before Council reflects both the breadth of our cooperation and the seriousness of the tasks before us.

Among the key issues for consideration are the status of the organisation's finances and progress on the Resource Mobilisation Framework and the operationalisation of the SADC Regional Development Fund. These matters are at the heart of our community's credibility and of our ability to move towards a common and prosperous future.

A particularly important item before us is the Mid-Term Review of the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan, RISDP 2020 to 2030. This is an opportunity not only to assess progress, but also to confront implementation gaps and sharpen our collective focus.

Our region is becoming a major centre of global attention as the world's leading economies intensify their search for critical minerals. The International Energy Agency projects that, under its net-zero scenario, demand for these minerals could increase fourfold by 2040. This presents a significant opportunity for our countries to accelerate industrialisation, deepen beneficiation and change the terms of our inclusion in the world economy.

Our region is exceptionally well placed in this regard. We hold 90% of global platinum group metal reserves, more than 50% of cobalt reserves, 20% of graphite reserves and 10% of copper reserves.

We have also shown collective resolve in seeking to overcome our disadvantaged position in the global economy. The G20 Critical Minerals Framework, the African Green Minerals Strategy, domestic policy measures and the regional agreements we have advanced all reflect a shared determination to move beyond the export of unprocessed raw materials. The agreement reached by SADC Ministers responsible for mining on the margins of the Mining Indaba is further evidence that only through regional cooperation can we unlock the full value of our mineral endowment.

The choice before us is clear: we can either engage the world from a position of unity and strength or approach it from a position of division and dependency.

Esteemed colleagues,

The continued relevance of the RISDP is equally clear. The persistent challenges we face such as low intra-regional trade at just 22%, high food insecurity, and the limited opportunities available to many young people in the region in education and employment, all confirm that the strategy is focused on the right issues.

At the same time, we must acknowledge the progress being made. We are seeing important gains in digital expansion, with internet penetration now at 54%, and in regional integration infrastructure through the rollout of One-Stop Border Posts.

Energy security remains vital to our industrialisation. It is therefore encouraging that more than we have added more than 14,000 megawatts of new generation capacity while increasing the share of renewables in the regional energy mix from about 25% to 38%.

These are important advances, but they also remind us of the scale of the work that still ahead.

If we are to realise meaningful outcomes by 2030, we will need greater discipline, clearer priorities and stronger execution. This includes consistent follow-through on previous Council and Summit decisions, as well as sharper focus on high-impact flagship initiatives.

The work before us over the next two days is therefore of real importance. Its success will not be measured simply by the number of decisions we adopt, but by the progress we make in transforming our economies and improving the well-being of our people.

The young entrepreneur in Lusaka, the farmer in Lilongwe, the miner in Lubumbashi, the trader in Gaborone and the worker in Johannesburg are not primarily concerned with the adoption of frameworks or strategies.

Their concern is whether regional integration produces meaningful economic opportunities and improves their prospects for a better future.

If integration remains rhetorical, confidence in our common agenda will diminish.

But if we act decisively and implement agreed commitments effectively, our region has the potential to emerge as a dynamic force for industrial growth, innovation and sustainable development.

With these words, I declare this Council of Ministers meeting officially open and wish us productive deliberations.

Thank you.