



STATEMENT

OF

THE SADC EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

H.E. DR STERGOMENA TAX

AT THE WORLD HUMANITARIAN SUMMIT

SOUTHERN SUN HOTEL, PRETORIA

SOUTH AFRICA

27th OCTOBER 2014

Your Excellency Valerie Amos, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator,

Your Excellency Ambassador E.D. Sale, representing Honourable Maite Nkoana-Mashabane, Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of the Republic of South Africa,

Distinguished Government and Regional Representatives,

Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Business Representatives,

Members of the Civil Society,

Distinguished Guests,

Media Representatives,

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is indeed a great pleasure and honour for me to have been invited to participate at this Regional Consultations in preparation for the World Humanitarian Summit to be held for the first time in 2016 in Istanbul, Turkey. Allow me to express, on behalf of SADC, our gratitude to the organisers of this very significant event for bringing together great minds to make input on how we can, together, make a breakthrough in the areas of humanitarian aid, and humanitarian diplomacy in particular, by dedicating our efforts and resources towards helping humanity facing natural disasters. I have no doubt that, all those gathered here, have brought vast knowledge and experiences that will enable mobilise and harness resources at national, regional and global levels to meet the demands of humanitarian challenges facing our communities world-wide.

I wish to welcome you to this regional consultation on a very significant topic of our times. I am encouraged by the turn up at this meeting. This

gives me hope that our discussions will be robust, focused and will ultimately produce outcomes that will make a huge contribution to the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016.

Distinguished Invited Guests,

Our presence here today affirms our collective belief that global humanitarian action needs to change. It is without doubt that today's humanitarian landscape is unrecognizable compared to 20 years ago. Global challenges like urbanization, population growth in some countries, environmental degradation, conflicts, climate change and resource scarcity mean that humanitarian needs are rising beyond the capacity of the global humanitarian system. With growing humanitarian need in the last decade, there is a growing gap between needs and resources. The sad reality is that we are facing ever more demands, as we deal with the effects of changing climate, growing populations, conflict and extremism.

We know that the likelihood of more droughts and more floods will also mean that future food supplies get threatened, invariably hurting the poorest. There are also increasing challenges associated with getting aid to civilians under fire with humanitarian access in conflict areas shrinking.

It is on this basis, that the United Nations has called for a World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 and why it is so important that in the lead up to 2016 we hold the same level of discussion on how we address humanitarian aid. Therefore, consultations, in this forum, are absolutely vital. I am delighted to have the opportunity to contribute to this debate and set out today what SADC sees as some of the key challenges and opportunities ahead.

Distinguished Invited Guests,

SADC Member States are vulnerable to a range of natural disasters and, since many events affect several countries simultaneously, a regional approach to managing the risks is appropriate and necessary.

Since 2000, our Member States have experienced an increase in the frequency, magnitude and impact of drought and floods. Climate change is

expected to significantly affect the region and increase risks related to water resources, fire, agriculture and food security. Furthermore, our island states, such as Seychelles, Mauritius, Madagascar, and part of the United Republic of Tanzania, Zanzibar, have their own unique set of problems – climate changes have left such countries in danger of losing their protective reef barrier and a sea-level rise could threaten survival.

Social and economic under-development, disease epidemics and the impacts of HIV & AIDS worsen the situation, posing significant threat to the SADC region and the ability to achieve the United Nations Millennium Development Goals and sustainable development.

Governments and partners in the SADC region need to implement disaster risk management to ensure community safety and protection of economic assets. Disaster risk management includes preparedness, mitigation, response, rehabilitation and recovery. It is multi-disciplinary, and involves the participation of a multitude of partners and stakeholders, ranging from national governments, non-government organisations, International Cooperating Partners, and the private sector.

Our main challenges currently include: Institutional frameworks for Disaster Risk Reduction at the regional, national and, in some cases, local/community level, which are often under-funded and not coordinated; Lack of comprehensive and constantly updated risk assessments and analysis; Weak information and knowledge management systems, specifically in high risk areas; and the need to reduce underlying risk factors.

I am pleased to inform you that SADC has taken a positive step. To this end, all SADC Member States have disaster management structures that undertake national activities. When unexpectedly heavy floods displaced more than a million people in Southern Africa in 2007, SADC began to meet annually to prepare for future possible occurrences.

SADC established a Disaster Risk Reduction Unit responsible for coordinating regional preparedness and response programmes for trans-

boundary hazards and disasters. The SADC Regional Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction was inaugurated in 2011.

Notwithstanding the existing SADC Disaster Risk Reduction Structure, we need to be cognizant of the changing landscape and emerging realities, and thus forge a regional approach which takes into account the diverse nature of humanitarian challenges that is linked to a global approach and responding to unique humanitarian challenges faced by individual countries and communities. Let us not wait until 2016 Istanbul Summit to make the change that need to be made now.

Sadly though, we are meeting here today amid a ravaging scourge of Ebola which threatens not only the human lives, but has taken a toll on affected countries' economies and put a huge strain on the already weak health systems. Perhaps the most lethal dimension of this scourge is its potential to undo the achievements made so far in Africa. So divisive is Ebola that most countries have adopted protectionist policies that undermine Africa's collective power and the whole aspiration of free movement of people, goods and services. Indeed this needs to be re-looked at with a view of addressing and combating Ebola in unity of purpose and collective efforts.

Distinguished Invited Guests,

Allow me, to once again thank the organisers of this very significant event. I wish to thank you, most sincerely for the hospitality extended to all of us here. I wish you fruitful deliberations and look forward to receiving positive tangible outcomes from these consultations.

I thank you.