



**Statement by the Executive Secretary of SADC, H.E. Mr Elias Mpedi Magosi,
on the Commemoration of the World AIDS Day**

1 December 2023

Today, 1 December 2023, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) joins the global community in commemorating the World AIDS Day, under the theme “**Let Community Lead**”, and we do so while reflecting on our efforts in responding to the HIV and AIDS pandemic in our region as well as the progress we have made towards ending AIDS as a public health threat.

This is a memorable year for the SADC Region as it marks 20 years since the Heads of State and Government gathered in Maseru, in the Kingdom of Lesotho to commit to jointly fighting HIV and AIDS in our region. On this day, they endorsed the Maseru Declaration of 2003 as the Region’s blueprint in addressing HIV and AIDS. In this regard, the region has continued to demonstrate political will and the following achievements were made:

- The SADC region has experienced a decline of 57% of new HIV infections, more than any other region on the globe;
- More than 80% of SADC citizens who are living with HIV have access to life saving treatment, while AIDS-related deaths have reduced by more than 60%; and
- Four (4) SADC Member States (Botswana, Eswatini, Zimbabwe and the United Republic of Tanzania) have reached the UNAIDS 95-95-95 targets well ahead of time, meaning that, in these Member States, 95% of all people living with HIV know their HIV status, 95% of people who know their status are on treatment, and 95% of people on HIV treatment have a suppressed viral load and several other Member States are close to achieving this key milestone.

In line with the theme, “**Let Community Lead**”, I applaud the communities in our region for the crucial role and the great contribution to HIV responses from households to the village community. Our traditional and local leaders have instilled the spirit of Ubuntu and solidarity that has always characterised our region. This solidarity has given us the resilience to continue to fight HIV and AIDS. As we recognize communities, let us also advocate for the greater involvement of our communities in mobilizing domestic resources and advocacy to also address Gender Based Violence, which is one of the key drivers of HIV, affecting especially women and girls in the SADC Region.

I encourage all SADC Member States to continue fostering community involvement and supporting the development and implementation of local solutions to our local problems to ensure community ownership and leadership in addressing challenges posed by HIV and AIDS and its impact in all aspects of our lives.

As we commemorate this year’s World AIDS Day, I appeal to all of us, at individual and community levels to continue the contribution to the fight against HIV, starting from our families, communities, workplaces, countries and the region as a whole. Let us continue to be agents of change in our quest to ending AIDS by 2030.