



**REMARKS BY HER EXCELLENCY, DR STERGOMENA LAWRENCE TAX
SADC EXECUTIVE SECRETARY**

DURING THE OFFICIAL OPENING

OF THE

**MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS RESPONSIBLE FOR DISASTER
RISK MANAGEMENT**

21ST FEBRUARY 2020

H.E Dr. Ali Mohamed Shein, President of Zanzibar and Chairman of the Revolutionary Council,

His Excellency Amb. Seif Ali Iddi, Second Vice President of Zanzibar,

Hon. Themba Nnlanganiso Masuku, Deputy Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Eswatini,

Hon. Jenista Joachim Mhagama, Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office of the United Republic of Tanzania and Chairperson of the Committee of Ministers responsible for Disaster Risk Management,

Hon. Mohamed Aboud Mohamend, Minister of State, Second Vice President Office in Zanzibar, and Minister in Charge of Disaster Risk Management Affairs,

Honourable Ministers,

Hon. Hassan Hatib, Regional Commissioner Urban West,

Hon. Zubeir Ali Maulid, Speaker of the House of Representatives,

Hon. Omar Othman Makungu, Chief Justice of Zanzibar,

Hon. Abdul – hamid, Chief Secretary, Zanzibar ,

Ms. Dorothy Aidan Mwaluko, Chairperson of the Committee of Senior Officials

Senior Officials and SADC Secretariat Staff,

Mrs. Christine Mendes, World Food Programme

Partners from the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to deliver these remarks and to take part in this very important meeting of the Committee of the Ministers responsible for Disaster Risk Management, that comes at a time when the region is experiencing challenges, and impacts of extreme weather events. Your presence here is an indication of the importance that you attach to management of disasters in the region.

Allow me Honourable Ministers to thank our host, the Government and the people of the United Republic of Tanzania, for the warm hospitality and the excellent facilities put at our disposal. Recognising that the United Republic of Tanzania is a Union of Zanzibar and Tanzania mainland, allow me to extend our gratitude to the Revolutionary Government and People of Zanzibar for their generosity since our arrival in this Stone Town of Zanzibar, a historic and World Heritage Site.

In a special way allow me to express our gratitude to His Excellency Dr. Ali Mohamed Shein, President of Zanzibar, and Chairperson of the Revolution Council for having accepted to grace this official ceremony of the meeting of the Committee of Ministers responsible for Disaster Risk Management.

Your Excellency,

Over the past three years, the region has experienced increased incidences of cyclones, torrential rains and floods. A total of thirteen (13) cyclonic systems were observed in the South-western Indian Ocean (SWIO) basin in 2019, the most devastating being Tropical Cyclone Idai, which made its landfall near Beira in Mozambique on 14th March 2019. The heavy rains and strong winds from Cyclone Idai led to flash flooding, killing hundreds of people, and a massive destruction of property, infrastructure and crops. Cyclone Idai has been described as the worst cyclone to have affected Africa. Less than six weeks later, on 25th April 2019, Cyclone Kenneth had another hard blow to northern Mozambique about 600 miles north of Idai's impact zone. Heavy flooding from the two storms affected close to 2.2 million people in Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Malawi, causing human deaths, an unprecedented amount of damage, and leaving a huge number of people homeless. To this day, several affected

communities are still struggling to recover from the devastating impacts of the two cyclones.

On 9th December 2019, cyclone Belna hit Madagascar causing heavy rains and flooding that resulted in the death of nine (9) people, injuries to many and the displacement of over 1,400 people. Over the same period, high levels of moisture from the Indian Ocean resulted in torrential rains in Botswana, Comoros, Madagascar, Mozambique and South Africa that resulted in destruction of infrastructure, injuries and loss of more lives.

Between December 2019 and January 2020, a number of SADC Countries including Angola, Botswana, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe have experienced above normal rains resulting in flash floods and destruction of livelihood, assets and loss of lives. Only two (2) to three (3) weeks ago, torrential rains and floods devastated Tanzania, killing forty (40) people, and leaving many displaced. These impacts were also felt in Northern Malawi where many people were left homeless and had to be accommodated in temporary makeshift homes.

Following heavy rains and floods emanating from tropical storm Diane that made landfall around the north-west of Madagascar, which caused the death of 31 people and destruction to property and infrastructure, Madagascar declared a State of Emergency on 24th January 2020, and activated the humanitarian response. In response to the state of emergency, the United Republic of Tanzania as the current Chairperson of SADC, authorised US\$250,000 to support Madagascar. May I thank the SADC Chairperson for acting swiftly to approve the release of funding towards humanitarian assistance to the communities affected by the recent floods, and also thank Member States for their support. SADC also issued a statement appealing to Partners to support the Republic of Madagascar. I wish to also extend our heartfelt gratitude to the European Union, and other Partners who heeded our call for support to our fellow brothers

and sisters in Madagascar - we appreciate our Partners' continued support in the region's socio-economic development.

Recurrent droughts have also affected agriculture production and productivity leading to food insecurity. According to the 2019 SADC Regional Vulnerability Assessment, an estimated 43.37 million people across 13 SADC Member States are acutely food insecure. This figure is 28% higher than the previous year, and 8% higher than during the El Niño-induced drought of 2016/2017, which at the time, was considered the most severe drought in 35 years.

Most subsistence farming households' cereal stocks have been depleted earlier than usual, and high food price inflation and above-average maize prices are being reported across several areas, including in historically price-stable areas. This has also led to widespread malnutrition across the region. While rates of acute malnutrition are generally below emergency levels in most SADC Member States, global acute malnutrition among children under the age of five (5) is above 5% in some SADC Member States, highlighting the need for scaling up social protection measures.

Honourable Ministers,

As you will agree with me, these challenges and disasters highlight the magnitude and gravity of the impacts that the region is likely to continue to face, and therefore, the need to put in place adequate measures to increase adaptive capacities and resilience of our people. It also emphasizes the need to take our environmental management across the region seriously, as these impacts are compounded by the destruction to the environment that would otherwise be acting as our shield to protect us from these devastating impacts.

According to predictions by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, an Intergovernmental Scientific Panel of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, disasters are projected to increase in both frequency and magnitude. The Southern African region is projected to be the hardest hit by these events, and we are already seeing the manifestations of such incidences.

In recognising the urgent need to address the impacts of climate change, the SADC Council of Ministers, during its meeting held in August 2019, approved the re-activation of the Ministerial Committee on Disaster Management and Response, and for the Committee to convene urgently, to assess the situation and provide advice. Your Committee meeting here today is the reactivated Committee to review progress on the ongoing regional interventions geared towards ensuring effective management of disasters in the region, so as to provide strategic guidance to the Region in order to ensure a coordinated and effective approach to disaster risk management in the Region. Hon. Ministers you have a big task ahead of you. SADC has confidence in your Committee, and the citizens are expecting deliverables and a difference. The Secretariat is committed and will serve the Committee diligently.

Honourable Ministers,

Our challenges are not only limited to weather induced disasters such as droughts and floods. We all know that we are currently facing a human crisis resulting from the novel coronavirus, that broke out in Wuhan, China, beginning of this month. So far, over 2000 people have died from the epidemic with over 74 000 affected, the majority of them in the People's Republic of China. SADC stands in solidarity with the Government and people of China, and welcomes the swift measures put in place to contain the virus. This notwithstanding, the mode of transmission and the rate at which the outbreak is spreading, highlights the dangers that we all face, and therefore the need to work together in managing these threats. I wish to thank all Member States for taking proactive steps to avoid cross-border transmission. We nonetheless need to remain vigilant and protect our citizens.

The region is also facing threats from cross-border crop pests and diseases. Currently Malawi and Mozambique are facing an invasion of red locusts that originated in Oman, Western Asia. These pests have destroyed crop fields, with potential to further plunge the region into severe food insecurity that has prolonged since 2016. At the same time there is also an outbreak of armyworm that has devastated crops in Malawi, parts of Tanzania and Zambia. All these

threats have cross border impacts which emphasize the need for cross-border collaboration and sharing of information. May I, therefore, call upon Member States to continue collaborating and putting in place measures to deal with these cross border threats.

Honourable Ministers,

The Secretariat is working on a number of initiatives to enhance disaster risk management, including putting in place mechanisms to ensure swift responses to quick onset disasters through the activation of the SADC Standby Force, involvement in humanitarian support operations during disasters, and the operationalisation of Emergency response teams to assist in disasters. Furthermore, SADC is working on modalities to operationalise the Regional Disaster Fund which, once operationalised will provide the much needed resources for disaster management. Your meeting today will also consider a draft Regional Resilience Framework, which once approved, will help to enhance resilience at all levels across the region.

May I call upon Member States to continue working with the Secretariat to enhance the region's preparedness and to step up measures to forecast, prepare and respond to these frequent disasters.

As I conclude, allow me to once again thank all of you for your participation. I am confident that with our commitment and combined efforts, the region will act swiftly and put in place response measures to alleviate the suffering of those affected by these natural disasters. Let us all commit to minimise the loss of lives, disruption of livelihoods and damage to socio-economic infrastructure - time is now. The Secretariat remains committed in pursuit of this very noble course.

May I also thank the Senior Officials and SADC Secretariat staff for the excellent work done in preparing for your meeting.

With these few remarks, I wish you, fruitful deliberations and a successful meeting.

Thank you
Muito Obrigada
Merci Beaucoup
Asante Sana!