OPENING REMARKS BY HON. DR. AUGUSTINE P. MAHIGA (MP) MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND EAST AFRICAN COOPERATION OF THE UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA AND THE CHAIRPERSON OF INTER-STATE POLITICS AND DIPLOMACY COMMITTEE, (ISPDC) MEETING HELD ON 24TH FEBRUARY, 2017 DAR ES SALAAM, TANZANIA.

Honorable Ministers, here present;
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Good Morning.

It is a great honor and privilege for me to host this important Statutory Meeting of the Inter-State Politics and Diplomacy Committee (ISPDC) of the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation. As was indicated by the Executive Secretary, a gathering of this nature draws its mandate from Article 6 (5) of the Protocol on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation, which makes provision for the Chairperson of the ISPDC to convene at least one meeting of the committee per year. I wish to welcome you brothers and sisters to the United Republic of Tanzania, a country where hospitality is our tradition.

Distinguished Delegates,

It is my first time to host this meeting since Tanzania assumed the Chair of the SADC Organ on Politics, Defense and Security Cooperation in August, 2016. As our role entails, we are here to discuss, deliberate on and come up with fruitful decisions on the political, peace and security situation in the region.

I wish to acknowledge and commend efforts made by member states to ensure that there is peace, security and stability particularly in our fellow Member States of the Kingdom of Lesotho and the Democratic Republic of Congo.
Since the last meeting, there have been a number of political developments within these two Member States and the Organ and MCO have initiated several interventions to address the instability. In the Kingdom of Lesotho, the Oversight Committee (OC) continues with its work on the ground, I am glad to announce that on 12th February 2017, the SADC Facilitator and members of the OC welcomed the leaders of opposition parties who had been in exile in South Africa. Thus, in line with the decisions of the SADC Summit, it is expected that the return of the exiled leaders will contribute to the national reconciliation of the Basotho nation as it prepares to undertake fundamental structural reforms aimed at normalizing the political and security challenges affecting the country since August 2014.

_Distinguished Delegates_

As for DRC, a direct Ministerial Assessment Mission has continued to maintain a presence there and provides continued support to the Member State. Recently, a technical assessment team comprising of officers from the Secretariat was deployed to the DRC from 13 to 17 February, 2017, to further assess the situation on the ground.

In light of the above, this meeting will give us an opportunity to interrogate these and other matters that continue to affect our Region. It will also give us an opportunity to review relevant policy documents that will enable us to execute this noble mandate in response to increasing contemporary complexities.

_Distinguished Delegates_

May I reiterate the importance of our duty to promote and protect democracy, which is a vehicle for unity and economic development in the SADC region. Let us recall that it is only through peaceful co-existence and stability that we can achieve all the goals of the community.
As the chair I am aware that, among other issues, during this meeting we will have an opportunity to set an agreed date on the commemoration of the Southern Africa Liberation day. A day that will signify the liberation struggles of the frontline states which led to the formation of the SADCC organization in 1980. The celebrations will also uphold and support the founding principles of the SADC Treaty and Protocol on Politics, Defense and Security cooperation which is the guiding book of the organ.

*Distinguished Delegates*

As you may all agree, SADC is one of the strongest and longest surviving regional groups in Sub-Saharan Africa. Not only that but it also has strong bonds that tie its members together. This has been highlighted by the requests from other states; the Union of Comoros in 2015 and from the Republic of Burundi in 2016 to join the organization. This meeting has been tasked to assess the eligibility of both states to join SADC.

Together, let us see if both states meet the set criteria for membership of SADC and advise our Heads of States accordingly.

*Distinguished Delegates*

With these few remarks and tasks ahead of us, I wish to declare this meeting officially opened.

“*Asanteni sana* “

“*Karibuni Tanzania*”