WELCOME REMARKS BY THE MINISTER ON THE OCCASION OF THE SADC SOLIDARITY CONFERENCE WITH SAHARAWI ARAB DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC
PRETORIA, 25 MARCH 2019

Your Excellency, Comrade Nnandi Ndaitwah, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of the Republic of Namibia, and Chairperson of the SADC Council of Minister;
Your Excellency, former President Olesugun Obasanjo of the Federal Republic of Nigeria;
Honourable Ministers from our region;
Your Excellency, Comrade Mohammed Salem Salek, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic;
Representatives of the former Liberation Movements and the Governing Political Parties from the SADC Region;
Ambassador Joseph Nourrice, Representative of the SADC Executive Secretary;
Representatives of Civil Society Organisations from the Region;
Members of the Solidarity Movement, Activists, and Friends of the Saharawi people;
Members of the Media here to cover this important Conference!

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you to the Republic of South Africa on this unprecedented occasion where our progressive region – SADC,
convenes a Solidarity Conference with the Saharawi people. Unprecedented in that we have no recollection of an intergovernmental body ever hosting a Conference of this nature. Although political formations have hosted such important Conferences in the past, we have no collection of an intergovernmental body hosting a conference of this nature.

I am glad that this conference is happening in South Africa, the most recently decolonised on the continent. It serves to remind us of what we have always believed, that until the last colony, the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic is decolonised, none of us are truly free.

This conference is the realisation of a formally adopted resolution by and binding on all of us as SADC. This principled decision was initiated by the SADC Council of Ministers in July 2017 in Tanzania. At the 37th SADC Summit following on the Ministerial Conference in August 2017, the convening of the conference on solidarity with the people of Saharawi was adopted by a unanimous decision by all. Today we are all here after a very successful meeting in Namibia in preparation for this conference.

Our gratitude goes to the Deputy Prime Minister of Namibia for her leadership who has thrown her energy into the preparations and made all of this possible. I welcome our Ministers and thank them for their principled stand with the people of the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic.

On behalf of the host country, I welcome you all, in particular those representing the people of the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic. We are
glad we have finally come together here in the land of Nelson Mandela to pledge the solidarity of the peoples of SADC. The progressive people of our country out there are extremely excited about this event and I hope it is televised and streamed to all of them so that they can feel part of this occasion.

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

This Conference therefore is a clear demonstration of our international solidarity with the Saharawi people in their quest for self-determination. Over the next 2 days, SADC hopes to come up with concrete steps in which we can strengthen and support the right of the Saharawi people to self-determination. It is this kind of solidarity and support for the people of Western Sahara that must give courage and impetus to their struggle for self-determination.

Most of us here have attained our freedom, strengthened and assisted by the solidarity of people who cared about our plight. We knew that every country has an inalienable right to independence and self-determination, consistent with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and applicable UNSC resolutions as well as the relevant decisions of the African Union and its predecessor the Organisation of the African Unity (OAU).

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

We are aware that the United Nations has played a significant role and passed many resolutions in raising the plight of the people of Saharawi long before most of us attained our freedom. On 14 December 1960, the United
Nations General Assembly (UNGA) unanimously passed Resolution 1514 (XV) also known as the “Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples”. This declaration made it possible in the course of the last fifty years for more than a hundred colonial territories to get independence, as well as several non-self-governing territories and those put under protection to exercise their right to self-determination and independence. Saharawi was one of these.

Since the adoption of Resolution 1514 (XV), a great number of former colonial territories, achieved their independence and are sovereign state members of the United Nations Organisation, carrying out, individually and collectively, their full responsibilities, with a view of implementing the goals and principles of the United Nations Charter.

Although the UN has taken an active role in this matter, we as SADC members have decided that our solidarity will complement these efforts; for as long as our sister peoples of Western Sahara continue to be denied their inalienable right to self-determination and independence consistent with the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations there is no post-colonial Africa. We are now free from colonialism and colloquial pallance and we call modern Africa, post-colonial Africa. We are here to ensure that it is indeed post-colonial in all states, because it is incorrect to repeat regular references to our continent as “post-colonial”, when the people of Western Sahara are not free.
Ladies and Gentlemen

As we gather here today for a just cause, we note with sadness that the Saharawi people are still fighting for their inalienable right to self-determination and for far too long. This notwithstanding the various attempts that have been made by our continental community, mainly by the African Union (and its predecessor the OAU) as well as the United Nations which has long decided that there must be a referendum in Western Sahara.

The first of such attempts was the August 1988 Settlement Plan, accepted by Morocco, that was jointly elaborated by the United Nations and OAU and endorsed by UN Security Council in its Resolutions 650 of 1990 and 690 of 1991. Furthermore, the UN Security Council resolutions, particularly resolutions 621 of 1988; and 658 of 1990 approved the holding of a referendum for self-determination of the people of Western Sahara.

The year 2019 marks 28 years since the signing of the Western Sahara ceasefire agreement, yet the Saharawi people have, year-in-year-out since then been denied the opportunity of holding a referendum to decide their future.

The Saharawi people are not asking for something impossible, but, a right to self-determination so that they can take responsibility for their own destiny. They do so because they have a right to it like any other nation in the world. A right that has been recognised in terms of International law since 1975 when the International Court of Justice (ICJ) provided an advisory note in which it did not recognise Morocco’s claim to this land. Since then there has been a myriad of international resolutions and court judgements that have
recognised the Sawahari people’s right to self-determination. The time has come to allow them to exercise their legitimate right to self-determination through a referendum!

**Honourable Ministers, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen**

Our support of the Western Sahara cause is based on several principles which include among others,

- Multilateralism and international legality in seeking lasting solutions to conflict;
- The centrality of the African Union and United Nations in the resolution of conflict;
- The respect for human rights law in the occupied territories, respect of international humanitarian law and support for the provision of humanitarian assistance to Saharawi refugees;
- An end to the illegal exploitation of the natural resources of Western Sahara in the illegally occupied territory;
- The need to respect the various Laws of Occupation that compels democratic states not to legitimise though its actions, Internationally Wrongful Acts, and
- Our opposition to colonialism, occupation and support for a nations right to self- determination.
Ladies and Gentlemen

We recognise the efforts of the United Nations Secretary-General’s Personal Envoy to Western Sahara, and the African Union High Representative for Western Sahara, His Excellency Joaquim Chissano, the former President of the Republic of Mozambique. We are also encouraged by and support the efforts of the United Nations Secretary-General’s Personal Envoy for Western Sahara, Mr Horst Köhler the former German President.

With the two at the help of this and the support of SADC we can confidently say that no situation is permanent and all of us are here to put the message across that a lasting solution to the Western Sahara conflict has to be found through the United Nations mechanism in a form of a referendum. That referendum must give the Saharawi people a clear choice, with one of the options being independence in a sovereign state. Anything else would not represent negotiations in good faith. South Africa firmly rejects any attempt to coerce or force the Saharawi people into a pre-determined outcome, or an outcome decided by others at their expense.

In conclusion, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the SADC Ministerial Conference, led by the Chair, the Republic of Namibia and the SADC Secretariat for an excellent collaboration in preparation for the Conference. We as South Africans are indeed honoured that our country was chosen to host this Conference. It is befitting that we hold this Conference on South African soil because democratic South Africa is itself a product of international solidarity.
This happened because many people in the world took a principled position on the need to support our struggle for freedom. The same applied to the support for the struggles of the peoples of Angola, Namibia, Zimbabwe and other countries.

To all of you present in this august gathering, accept my country’s gratitude for being part of this event. It is important that we find common ground as we consolidate international solidarity with the Saharawi people to realise their inalienable right to self-determination.

I wish all of you successful deliberation and for this conference to provide concrete support to the people of Saharawi. Let them leave this conference with a lighter burden and the knowledge that we are fully behind them.

I thank you for your attention.