



REMARKS

BY

**H.E. DR. STERGOMENA LAWRENCE TAX
SADC EXECUTIVE SECRETARY**

DURING OFFICIAL OPENING OF

**THE 22nd MEETING OF THE MINISTERIAL COMMITTEE OF THE ORGAN (MCO) ON
POLITICS, DEFENCE AND SECURITY COOPERATION VIDEO CONFERENCE
MEETING**

**26 JUNE 2020
HARARE, REPUBLIC OF ZIMBABWE**

Hon. Lt. Gen. (retired) Dr. Sibusiso Moyo, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Trade of the Republic of Zimbabwe, and Chairperson of the Ministerial Committee of the SADC Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation (MCO),

Honourable Ministers and Members of the MCO,

Chairperson of the Committee of Senior Officials, Permanent Secretaries, Chiefs of Security Institutions and Delegates from SADC Member States,

SADC Secretariat Staff,

Partners from the Media,

May I take this opportunity to welcome you all to this 22nd meeting of the SADC Ministerial Committee of the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation, which is being held virtually for the first time due to extraordinary circumstances necessitated by COVID-19. Notwithstanding the difficult times we are in, this meeting gives us another opportunity to discuss and exchange ideas on how to accelerate SADC regional integration, while sustaining peace and security in our region.

Honourable Ministers, allow me to begin by extending our profound gratitude to the Chairperson of MCO, Honourable Rtd. Lt. Gen. Dr. Sibusiso Moyo, for the leadership provided in guiding the work of the Ministerial Committee of the Organ, especially as we operate in a very difficult environment compounded by, among others, the COVID-19 pandemic. It was not easy, but the region under your exemplary leadership has managed to discharge a number of pressing and critical issues. Thank you Honourable Minister.

Honourable Ministers,

Since your last meeting in July, 2019, four (4) Member States, namely Botswana, Mauritius, Mozambique and Namibia, conducted elections. Allow me to congratulate the newly elected governments. The elections were conducted in a peaceful manner and in line with the provisions of the respective countries' legal frameworks, and SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections. While some electoral outcomes were contested, that was done in line with the governing legal frameworks, demonstrating maturity of democracy in the region. Nonetheless, low participation of women and youth in elected political positions remains a concern that requires special attention by SADC. May

I also express our gratitude to the Chairperson of the Organ for remaining steadfast in leading SADC Electoral Observation Missions to these Members States, and Organ Troika Member States for supporting the Chairperson of the Organ. May I also thank Member States for nominating observers to form part of SADC Electoral Observation Missions to these countries.

Since your meeting in July 2019, the region has also witnessed the election and swearing in of new Prime Minister in the Kingdom of Lesotho. May I congratulate the new Prime Minister and the Government and people of the Kingdom of Lesotho for a democratic transition of power.

During the year, presidential and general elections will be held in the Republics of Malawi, Seychelles and the United Republic of Tanzania. We thank the Chairperson of the Organ, who has given clear guidance on the matter, and directed the Secretariat to ensure that the region remains seized with the matter in line with SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections, while addressing the challenges brought about by COVID-19.

Honourable Ministers,

On a happy note, we note that a number of SADC Member States are celebrating their respective independence anniversaries during this month of June, these are the Republics of Mozambique, Madagascar, and Seychelles, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. May I congratulate these sister counties, and wish them Happy Anniversaries, and continued prosperity.

Honourable Ministers,

The COVID-19 pandemic has altered the socio-economic landscape globally, and peace and security have not been spared from the impacts of COVID-19. Cybercrime and other criminal acts have been on the increase, while the sale of counterfeit medical supplies and equipment have also increased with potential long-term implications on the health-security nexus and stability in the region. Even more worrying is the increase in cases of gender-based violence. These emerging challenges call for the region to remain vigilant and innovative in devising ways of addressing the security impacts of COVID-19 in a holistic manner. Noting that the impacts of COVID-19 cut across sectors, Member States have put in place a number of measures that have significantly contributed to the containment of its spread, and in cushioning its negative impacts on SADC economies and livelihoods of citizens. May I commend SADC Member

States for adopting a multi-stakeholder approach in addressing COVID-19, which is yielding positive results. This notwithstanding, as we battle with COVID-19, lives have been lost. May I express our condolences and solidarity with the SADC citizens who have lost their loved ones, and to governments of our Member States who have lost frontline workers due to COVID-19 and other causes.

Honourable Ministers,

Cognizant of the fact that peace and security are fundamental for development and regional integration, SADC has prioritized peace and security as a foundation for socio-economic development. This notwithstanding, we should remain alive to the fact that the global peace and security landscape is dynamic and evolving. Emerging security threats are bringing new dimensions to the way we should safeguard peace and security. Increasingly, the Region is experiencing a surge in security threats that threaten to undermine our development trajectory, which require urgent attention and a new thinking, in order to address the emerging peace and security threats in a timely, holistic and dynamic manner.

As part of its think-tanking mandate, the Secretariat has carried out a security threat assessment, which shows that the region is marked by several obstacles to socio-economic and political transformation, including poverty, inequality, and unemployment. The assessment categorizes peace and security threats into five clusters relating to terrorism and cybersecurity; transnational organized crime; climate change and epidemics; governance and democracy; and cross-cutting issues. Cross cutting issues include marginalization and exclusion, radicalization and extremism, political and economic exploitation, as well as forms of violence, including gender-based violence, criminal activities, abuse of social media, and a migration crisis. While SADC has always been vigilant, and has put in place measures to sustain peace and security, it is prudent to note that we operate in a fast moving and dynamic environment. May I, therefore, appeal to the Committee to seriously consider the findings of the Threat Assessment, and the proposed measures, and in doing so enable the region to act in a timely manner, and decisively. This will contribute to sustained peace, security and stability that the region has enjoyed over the years, which remains a symbol and pride of SADC.

Honourable Ministers,

SADC was liberated through hard work, dedication and sacrifices made by the Founders of SADC. In this recognition, the Summit in 2015 directed

the Secretariat to develop a mechanism in honour of the Founders of SADC. Development of the mechanism commenced immediately, through an extensive consultative process. I am happy to report to you today that this work is about to be completed, and the proposed Mechanism will be submitted for your consideration during the course of your meeting. I am confident that the draft will be considered favourably by your Committee, and enable the Region to recognize and honour the contribution and sacrifices made by the Founders of Southern Africa, and this may be one of the milestones of the 2020 MCO.

Honourable Ministers,

Political stability and consolidation of democracy remain among our key regional priorities. Democracy may be defined differently based on history and the prevailing socio-political dynamics. Whereas as a region we embrace regionalism, hand in hand with globalism and partnership principles, our definition of democracy is also premised on the principles of territorial integrity and sovereignty. As part of consolidation of democracy, SADC deploys Electoral Observation Missions to Member States. In order to avoid compromising our sovereignty and territorial integrity, the deployment of SADC Electoral Observation Missions should be done through own financial and human resources. The ownership of our democratic processes provides us with an opportunity to collectively identify and address potential threats to peace and security, such as external interference and cybercrime, which include social media abuse. It is, therefore, vital that we address challenges associated with funding of electoral observation in the region, and ensure that the electoral processes and democracy in the region are not exposed and compromised due to financial exigencies. In this regard, a proposal for sustainable funding of Electoral Observation Missions between 2021-2025 will be tabled for your consideration.

While mobilizing resources to independently fund our SADC Electoral Observation Missions, we should also take into consideration the need to finalize the construction of the SADC Standby Force Regional Logistics Depot (RLD). It is gratifying to report that Phase II, which includes designing and construction of the depot, has commenced. However, resources to take Phase II to finality remain a challenge, and the gap requires a regional resolve.

Honourable Ministers,

It is now 15 years since the Protocol on Facilitation of Movement of Persons was adopted in 2005, yet only seven (7) Member States have

ratified, which is below the minimum required number of ratifications for a protocol to enter into force. While we commend the Member States that have ratified the Protocol, it is critical that we understand the challenges that impede other members to sign and ratify the Protocol and resolve them collectively. COVID-19 has, among others, pointed to the urgent need of facilitating movement of persons during normal times, and during pandemics. May I call upon Member States to critically reflect on this very important and urgent matter to our regional integration.

Honourable Ministers,

The usage of firearms to commit crime is on the increase in the SADC region, and this is a cause for concern. This is particularly worrying as the majority of the firearms are either unmarked, unregistered, or are stolen. In view of this, the implementation of the SADC Protocol on the Control of Firearms, Ammunition and Other Related Materials is very pertinent. Following your directive in your previous meeting held in Lusaka in July 2019, Secretariat coordinated a review of the SADC Protocol on the Control of Firearms, Ammunition and Other Related Materials, and the Draft Agreement Amending the Protocol will be tabled for your consideration during your meeting today. It is important that we ensure that the gaps that necessitated the review are adequately addressed, while enhancing our capacity in firearm marking, and control, so as to ensure the safety of our citizens. May I extend our appreciation to our Cooperating Partners that provided technical support during the review.

Honourable Ministers,

The security situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is a matter that has preoccupied SADC for a long time. This notwithstanding, DRC remains an integral member of our Community and requires all our support in addressing the insurgencies in the eastern part of the country, and all the negative forces. May I express our profound gratitude to all Member States, in particular the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) Troop Contributing Countries, for the commitment and continued support to our sister country. On 19 November 2019, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 2502, which extended the mandate of the MONUSCO for one more year. While SADC welcomes the extension of the MONUSCO mandate, we call for closing the gaps in terms of areas that have the potential to undermine operational effectiveness and the unity of command of the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB), in line with the SADC position that has been submitted to the United Nations.

Honourable Ministers,

As I conclude, may I applaud SADC Member States for the collective efforts in ensuring sustained peace and prosperity of SADC. Allow me to once again thank Honourable Rtd. Lt. Gen. Dr. Sibusiso Moyo, Chairperson of MCO, for his remarkable leadership in steering the work of the Ministerial Committee of the Organ during his tenure as Chairperson of the Committee. In the same vein, I wish to thank Member States for your commitment to SADC peace and security agenda. May I also thank the Senior Officials under the exemplary leadership of Amb. James Manzou, supported by the various Committees of the Organ, for the dedication to the work of the Organ, and for having performed a number of activities during the year that have enabled the Organ to deliver, notwithstanding COVID-19. Allow me to also recognize the dedication and professionalism demonstrated by the Secretariat Staff and the continued support rendered to me, which have enabled me to discharge my duties.

We welcome the Incoming Chairperson of the MCO, Honourable Unity Dow, and assure her of our unwavering support and professional services.

**I thank you for your attention,
Merci beaucoup,
Muito obrigada,
Asante sana.**