



**Statement by Honourable Dr. Lemogang Kwappe, Minister of International Affairs and Cooperation of Botswana, and Head of the SADC Electoral Stakeholders' Consultations and Elections Follow-Ups to the 2020 National Assembly and Presidential Elections in the Republic of Seychelles and the General Elections in the United Republic of Tanzania**

Two Member States in our region, the Southern African Development Community (SADC), will be holding elections in the month of October 2020. From 22<sup>nd</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> October 2020, the people of the Republic of Seychelles will participate in their National Assembly and Presidential Elections. On 28<sup>th</sup> October 2020, the people of the United Republic of Tanzania will be voting in their General Elections.

Under normal circumstances, SADC Electoral Observation Missions (SEOMs) would have been deployed to the two SADC Member States. The Missions would by now, be physically engaging with the various stakeholders, including electoral authorities, political parties, community leaders, faith-based organizations, civil society, and the media. This is always done with a view to assess the readiness and conduct of the electoral processes, in order to observe the actual voting, counting, and declaration of the election results.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has, however, disrupted our normal practice. SADC Member States, like all countries around the world, have put in place measures to contain the rapid spread of the virus. This among others, includes quarantines, border closures, suspension of travels, social distancing, and the banning of public gatherings and events.

Whilst the incidences of COVID-19 are relatively low in the Republic of Seychelles and the United Republic of Tanzania, the regional scenario and travel restrictions, and the need to safeguard public health, have negatively affected the region's ability to physically deploy Electoral Observation Missions in a conventional manner.

Nonetheless, to uphold democratic principles and to remain in solidarity with our two Member States, SADC will hold virtual consultations with electoral stakeholders in these countries, and closely follow-up the electoral processes. This approach is part of our continued efforts towards upholding democratic principles despite the prevailing challenges hampering physical election observation on the ground.

In this context, and on behalf of His Excellency Dr. Mokgweetsi Eric Keabetswe Masisi, the President of the Republic of Botswana, and the Chairperson of the SADC Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation, it is my honour to announce the launch of the SADC virtual engagements with electoral stakeholders in the Republic of Seychelles and in the United Republic of Tanzania.

Through these virtual engagements, SADC will remain seized with the electoral processes in the two Member States, and will be able to obtain the views of electoral stakeholders on the conduct of the elections. The virtual engagements will enable SADC to identify areas of continued support in the consolidation of democracy, and to gather information to inform other post-election interventions.

Even though SADC is not physically deploying its election observation missions to the two countries; the values enshrined in the *SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections (2015)* remain valid as a source of guidance. As such, the virtual engagements were preceded by pre-election consultations with electoral stakeholders in the Republic of Seychelles and the United Republic of Tanzania. These were conducted by the SADC Electoral Advisory Council (SEAC) in August 2020, in accordance with the *SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections*.

SEAC sought the views of electoral stakeholders regarding the level of preparedness for the countries to hold the elections, which included the prevailing political and security situations and the performance of Election Management Bodies (EMBs). The Council members also assessed the implementation of SEOM's previous recommendations. The pre-election consultations concluded that both the Republic of Seychelles and the United Republic of Tanzania were prepared to hold their respective elections in October 2020.

Mindful of the limitations occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic and similar challenges, the region has initiated measures to ensure that future physical deployment of SADC Electoral Observations Missions continues during crisis situations such as the outbreak of pandemics. To this end, on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2020, SADC considered a draft of the *Guidelines for Election Observation under Public Health Emergencies*, which is currently under review by Member States. Among others, the Guidelines will strengthen the region's efforts to build democratic institutions, despite pandemics. Once operational, the Guidelines will contribute to strengthening SADC's interventions in respect to disaster preparedness, disaster risk reduction and management, and strategic responses to pandemics.

On behalf of the Chairperson of the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation, His Excellency Dr. Mokgweetsi Eric Keabetswe Masisi, the President of the Republic of Botswana, I encourage all stakeholders to ensure that these elections are conducted in a peaceful, free, fair, transparent, and credible manner. As a region, we look forward to electoral processes that adhere to democratic values and principles envisioned in our SADC Treaty, the SADC Protocol of Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation; and the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections (2015).

Thank you very much

Merci beaucoup

Muito obrigado

Asante sana.

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