



**OPENING REMARKS BY**

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MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL  
TRADE AND CHAIRPERSON OF THE SADC MINISTERIAL  
COMMITTEE OF THE ORGAN**

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE  
22<sup>ND</sup> MEETING OF MINISTERIAL COMMITTEE OF THE  
ORGAN (MCO) ON POLITICS, DEFENCE AND SECURITY  
CO-OPERATION**

**MEIKLES HOTEL, HARARE**

**26 JUNE 2020**

Honourable Ministers and Dear Colleagues;

Your Excellency Dr. Stergomena Lawrence Tax, Executive Secretary of SADC;

Senior Officials;

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my singular honour and privilege, to welcome you all to this 22<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the SADC Ministerial Committee of the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation. In the 'old normal', this was supposed to be a physical meeting hosted here in Zimbabwe had it not been for COVID-19. Nonetheless, I am delighted to meet you via this virtual platform thanks to technological advancement that has made it possible for us to proceed with the meeting. Let me hasten to express my sincere gratitude to the Executive Secretary, her team and Senior Officials for making this meeting possible. May I also appreciate your sterling efforts to keep the work of the Organ on track in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Honourable Ministers,

As we continue to grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic, we have had to accept that this unforeseen challenge will be with us much longer than anticipated and that it will also have a significant impact on lives and livelihoods. A preliminary analysis of the regional and global impact of COVID-19 paints a grim picture. In the region, the pandemic has either slowed down or

halted the implementation of SADC programmes and projects that are critical to the development of our countries and the well-being of our peoples.

Honourable Ministers,

You will agree with me that the unfolding of such a scenario could be a catalyst to more unforeseen challenges. One such challenge is, as the World Food Programme Executive Director once remarked: “***There is no food security without peace, and there is no peace without food***”.

The magnitude and extent of the impact of COVID-19 on our respective economies, the likely effect on the peace, security and stability of our countries and the region, will require our undivided attention. There is therefore urgent need for us to adapt to the new normal and review our way of conducting business. As Amit Tray aptly put it, “***Every crisis demands self-discipline, patience, early adaptation and adjustment to the changing situation***”. A case in point is the need to re-look at our immigration policies in the wake of COVID-19.

May I commend the Secretariat for its monthly briefs to Member States on the impact of the pandemic on the economies of the region. This keeps us informed and updated on most issues and developments. However, in order to reduce the risk of us being full of opinions with half the facts, I further urge the Secretariat to broaden the scope of their analyses to include all sectors in

order to equip us with concrete facts that will enable us to make strategic and informed decisions on the way forward.

Honourable Ministers,

Our founding fathers, among the SADC organisational structures, consummated the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation, as a vital body entrusted with the maintenance of peace, stability and security in our region. It constitutes an integral part of our efforts towards regional integration and development. It also bodes well with Mwalimu, Julius Kambarage Nyerere's remark that, ***“My generation led Africa to political freedom. The current generation of leaders and peoples must pick up the flickering torch of African freedom, refuel it with their enthusiasm and determination, and carry it forward.”*** Befittingly, the SADC Treaty commits all Member States to “consolidate, defend and maintain democracy, peace, security and stability” in the region. Our region can only make progress, if there is sustained peace and stability.

Your presence here today is a clear demonstration of our unwavering and collective commitment to working towards a peaceful, stable, secure and prosperous region. The essence of collective togetherness is summarised by Henry Ford as follows: ***“Coming together is a beginning, keeping together is progress and working together is success”***.

Honourable Ministers, this behoves us, and we are duty-bound, to put our heads together and do all we can to safeguard peace, security and stability in the region.

Our meeting today will, among other things, assess the progress made in the implementation of MCO and Summit decisions; discuss prevailing security threats in the SADC Region, the consolidation of democracy in SADC, as well as review the political and security situation in the region. As we do so, our deliberations are guided by Kwame Nkrumah's exhortation that, ***"...we must find an African solution to our problems, and ... this can only be found in African unity. Divided we are weak; united, Africa could become one of the greatest forces for good in the world."***

May we also be energized and encouraged by Kwame Nkruma's realist quote that reads: ***"Countrymen, the task ahead is great indeed, and heavy is the responsibility; and yet it is a noble and glorious challenge, a challenge which calls for the courage to dream, the courage to believe, the courage to dare, the courage to do, the courage to envision, the courage to fight, the courage to work, the courage to achieve - to achieve the highest excellencies and the fullest greatness of man. Dare we ask for more in life?"***

Honourable Ministers,

It is also high time; we reviewed the scope and capabilities of the SADC Standby Force with a view to reconfigure it to effectively respond to contemporary threats. While the SADC Standby Force has acquitted itself exceptionally well in peace support operations, it is yet to engage in formal conventional deployment. Its composition inevitably has to match prevailing threats. To this end, we need to build an embedded regional disaster response capability that is integral to the SADC Standby Force. We may also begin to consider the establishment of a Regional Peace Fund in order to avoid a last minute rush in resource mobilisation prior to a deployment. An old adage goes: ***‘proper preparation prevents poor performance.’***

Honourable Ministers,

On the political front, SADC Member States have consistently demonstrated their commitment to strengthening democracy through, among other efforts, holding of regular elections and adherence to the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections. This testifies to a maturing and deepening democratic culture in the region. I am pleased to report that between July and November 2019, four countries in the region held general elections, all of which were declared peaceful, credible, free and fair. I wish to congratulate these countries and peoples on their successful elections.

Honourable Ministers,

It is SADC tradition to observe elections in Member States as enshrined in the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections. However, due to the challenges imposed by COVID-19, you are all aware that we were unable to deploy a SADC Election Observation Mission to our sister country Malawi for the election held on 23 June 2020. However, with the support of the SADC Secretariat, the SADC Electoral Advisory Council and SADC Embassies in Lilongwe, the region has been able to remain engaged with stakeholders in Malawi for regular updates on the electoral processes. Allow me at this point to take particular note of the peaceful manner in which the people of Malawi conducted themselves during polling on 23 June, 2020. We continue to urge all stakeholders in Malawi to exercise maximum patience and restraint and allow the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) the time and space to tally and announce the result of the current election at the earliest possible opportunity and in conformity with the Malawi electoral law.

Honourable Ministers,

Our ability to deploy SADC Election Observation Missions will continue to be compromised by pandemics such as COVID-19. We are scheduled to have elections in the Republic of Seychelles and the United Republic of Tanzania during the last quarter of 2020. Consequently, this will require Member States to be innovative in exploring viable options to ensure the conduct of

elections and that our election observation missions are carried out without compromising the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections. The Secretariat's brief on this important matter will be a useful basis for our discussions.

Honourable Ministers,

Let me also commend the efforts of the SADC Secretariat in monitoring and assessing security threats to the SADC region and for preparing the Report on the Threat to Peace and Security in the Region in 2020. Whilst the Report establishes that the security landscape in the SADC region has generally been stable, it also notes that there are externally and internally induced threats to the security of Member States such as terrorism; cybercrime; transnational organised crime; climate change and disasters (including pandemics and epidemics); governance and democracy challenges; marginalisation and exclusion; radicalisation and extremism; political and economic exploitation; migration crisis; and the abuse of social media. As we deliberate on these current and potential threats to our stability, peace and security, let us reflect deeply on how to strengthen and make full use of mechanisms such as the SADC Early Warning System; Regional Counter-Terrorism Strategy and the SADC Standby Force, among others, to timeously, strategically, holistically and comprehensively address these threats.

Furthermore, we should also be alive to the cross-cutting issues that present challenges and opportunities to our region. These

cross-cutting issues are well summarised in the documents that we will be considering.

Honourable Ministers,

As I conclude, allow me to wish us all, very constructive deliberations which should culminate in the adoption of decisions that are critical to the furtherance and sustenance of peace, security and stability in our region. It is only through this sustained peace, security and stability that we can realise our cherished development goals.

With these few remarks, I have the honour to declare this “22<sup>nd</sup> Meeting of the Ministerial Committee of the Organ (MCO) on Politics, Defence and Security Co-operation” officially open.

I thank you!

*Merci beaucoup!*

*Muito Obrigado!*

*Asante Sana!*