

#### **STATEMENT**

BY

## SADC EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

H.E. DR. STERGOMENA LAWRENCE TAX

ON THE OCCASION OF THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF

THE MEETING OF SADC MINISTERS RESPONSIBLE FOR GENDER/

WOMEN'S AFFAIRS

29<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2015

HARARE, ZIMBABWE

**Director of Ceremony** 

Hon. Emmerson D. Mnangagwa, Acting President of the Republic of Zimbabwe,

Honourable Sithembiso G. G. Nyoni, Acting Minister of Women Affairs, Gender, and Community Development,

Honourable Ministers.

Senior Officials,

**Development Partners**,

Members of the Media,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am gladly honoured to take part in this very important meeting of Ministers responsible for Gender and Women Affairs. Allow me from the outset, to convey our gratitude to the Government and people of the Republic of Zimbabwe for the warm welcome and hospitality extended to all of us since our arrival in this beautiful sunshine city of Harare, and for the excellent facilities provided to make this meeting a success.

I also wish to thank the Republic of Zimbabwe for its commitment and dedication to the SADC regional integration and development agenda. The hosting of this meeting, and the steadfast leadership in spearheading SADC programmes and activities, and achievements realised, including the development of the SADC Industrialisation Strategy that was approved by Summit on 29<sup>th</sup> April, 2015, are testimonies of Zimbabwe's commitment since taking over the Chairpersonship of SADC.

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The Industrialisation Strategy and Roadmap recognise the need to mainstream gender and will contribute to gender equality enhancement. Since this is the first meeting of Ministers responsible for Gender and Women Affairs I am attending since my appointment as the 6<sup>th</sup> Executive Secretary, and first female Executive Secretary of SADC in 35 years since the establishment of SADC, allow me to extend my heartfelt gratitude for the overwhelming support rendered to me continuously since my appointment. I received congratulatory notes from all of you, and I thank you for the kind words and the encouragements.

# Hon. Acting President,

I wish to take this opportunity to thank the SADC Ministerial cluster on Gender and Women Affairs for championing the cause of women empowerment in the region, and to thank all women and women-empowerment supporters in SADC, and beyond SADC for their tireless efforts which are producing visible achievements. We are also highly indebted to our leaders in the region, in this regard our Heads of State and Government for their resolve and commitment in women empowerment. Deliberate efforts are indeed bearing fruits as the ratio of women in leadership positions in the region is on the increase. We have Vice Presidents, Prime Ministers, Deputy Prime Ministers, Speakers of Parliaments, Chiefs of Justice, Ministers, Heads of key regional and international institutions in the SADC region, just to mention a few. As the first female Executive Secretary of SADC, I am among the direct products, and part of these efforts, and a living testimony that your efforts are indeed making a difference.

May I take this opportunity to congratulate all Member States that have achieved high representation of women in political and decision making positions, and encourage those lagging behind to take appropriate measures. Special commendations go to Zambia and Mauritius for appointing the first female Vice Presidents, and Namibia for appointing the first female Prime Minister and the second female Deputy Prime Minister. While results are visible in social, economic, politics and public life decision making positions, sustainable empowerment requires our monitoring and feedback mechanism to be enhanced to allow us to take further steps and corrective measures in a timely manner, and to ensure that the empowerment of women continues to gain momentum.

### Hon. Acting President,

SADC Member States share a common "vision" of forging a future within a regional community that will result in durable peace, security, freedom and social justice, equitable development and sustained economic prosperity for the peoples of Southern Africa. The attainment of this vision involves a commitment to addressing the priority needs of reducing poverty and socio-economic inequalities among the peoples of the SADC region, in particular women, children and others who are most vulnerable in our societies such as the disabled and elderly. Thus our efforts should be based on the recognition that reducing poverty and the realisation of human rights in the region are inextricably linked to reducing gender inequalities and discrimination, as such socio-economic policies and strategies must continue being engendered.

The year 2015 is a very important year in the area of Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality as we commemorate the 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the historic United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security; 20 years after the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action; African Union Year of Women Empowerment; and the target year for the Millennium Development Goals, and SADC Protocol on Gender and Development goals.

The review of targets in the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development is very critical. It is encouraging to note that the review is one of the main agenda items that this meeting will focus on so as to align these targets to the Post 2015 Sustainable Development Goals, the AU Agenda 2063 and other relevant regional, continental and international instruments. Gender is cross cutting, and needs to be integrated in all socio-economic pillars of regional integration. Therefore, while reviewing our targets, we should identify, link and make cross referencing of the thematic key intervention areas in the protocol to the relevant sectoral protocols, policies and strategies, both at national and regional level.

# Hon. Acting President,

SADC is proud of being the only regional economic community with a legally binding instrument on gender, but our pride should be cemented on the premise that there are tangible results that we showcase to the world. We have indeed made commendable strides in the

implementation of our protocol, and the momentum should be maintained.

Hon. Acting President,

Notwithstanding the recorded achievements, and the fact that the region is peaceful and stable, we are still faced by social ills such as gender based violence especially those perpetrated against women and children; high levels of poverty, especially amongst women; the scourge of HIV and AIDS and its disproportionate impact on women; and human trafficking which affects mainly women and children. We should, therefore, put more efforts and adopt strategies to ensure that effective measures and practices are put in place to address these social ills.

In conclusion, I wish to assure you of my personal dedication and commitment, and services of the Secretariat through the development and implementation of programmes, policies, frameworks, guidelines, and other regional instruments and initiatives. With these few remarks, I thank you, and wish you all fruitful deliberations.

I THANK YOU!

**OBRIGADA!** 

MERCI!

NDATENDA!

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