



STATEMENT

BY

**HIS EXCELLENCY MR. FÉLIX ANTOINE TSHISEKEDI TSHILOMBO,
PRESIDENT OF THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO
(DRC)**

AND CHAIRPERSON OF SADC

ON THE OCCASION OF THE VISIT TO THE SADC SECRETARIAT

BOTSWANA

10 MAY 2023

Your Excellency, Deputy Prime Minister, and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mr Christophe Lutundula Apala Pen'Apala;

Your Excellency, Minister of Regional Integration of the Democratic Republic of Congo and Chairperson of the SADC Council of Ministers, Mr Antipas Mbusa Nyamwisi

Hon. Dr Lemogang Kwape, Minister of Foreign Affairs, of the Republic of Botswana,

Your Excellency, the Executive Secretary of SADC, Mr Elias Magosi,

Your Excellency, Ambassador of the Democratic Republic of Congo to the Republic of Botswana, and SADC National Contact Person for the DRC, Mrs. Emilie Ayaza Mushobekwa,

Deputy Executive Secretary responsible for Regional Integration, Ms. Angele Makombo N'tumba at SADC Secretariat

Deputy Executive Secretary responsible for Corporate Affairs, Ambassador Joseph Nourrice SADC Secretariat

Government Officials from Botswana and the Democratic Republic of Congo;

Members of Staff of the SADC Secretariat,

Members of the Media,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me begin by expressing my heartfelt gratitude to the people of Botswana under the leadership of His Excellency Dr. Mokgweetsi Eric Keabetswe Masisi, President of the Republic of Botswana, for the warm welcome and hospitality accorded to me and my delegation since our arrival in this warm and beautiful country.

I am also very grateful to the SADC Executive Secretary, His Excellency Mr Elias Magosi and his team at the Secretariat, for working tirelessly to prepare for this visit.

Your Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great honour to have this opportunity to visit the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Headquarters in my capacity as Chairperson of SADC. My visit comes at a time when we have made significant progress in advancing regional cooperation, despite challenges the region is undergoing.

Since its establishment in 1980, SADC has consistently shown unwavering solidarity and unity against the many challenges the region faces. The peace and security situation in the region remains relatively stable, notwithstanding the ongoing security threats experienced in a few of our SADC Member States; including my own country, the Democratic Republic of Congo. As a region, we continue to support Member States experiencing political and security challenges to address the situation and ensure stability prevails. I have just come from a SADC Summit where, as a region, we deliberated on how to support the security situation in the eastern part of my country. In this regard, I wish to recognise the dedication and leadership of His Excellency Dr Hage Geingob, President of the Republic of Namibia, and Chairperson of the SADC Organ on politics, defence and security cooperation, as well as personnel in regional structures, who are playing a crucial role and continue to assist us in ensuring that the region remains peaceful and stable.

As a region, we have evolved from being a coordinating conference to an active regional development community and a key building block of African Unity. At the continental level, the African Union Commission, using the African Multidimensional Regional Integration Index (AMRII), has rated SADC's status of regional integration at 0.64 out of a scale of 0 – 1, meaning SADC has performed fairly well, compared to other Regional Economic Communities, particularly in financial integration, infrastructural integration, trade integration and environmental integration.

Our solidarity and commitment to deeper regional integration have been demonstrated by the signing of over 33 protocols covering a wide range of sectors including agriculture, food security and natural resources, infrastructure, industrial development, trade, investment and finance, social and human development, and peace and security.

Added to these protocols, are instruments and policies, which include the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan; Strategic Indicative Plan for the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation; SADC Industrialization Strategy and

Roadmap (2015-2063); SADC Regional Agricultural Policy; and SADC Regional Infrastructure Development Master Plan.

Put together, all these protocols and instruments have laid a strong legal and policy framework for promoting regional cooperation and integration in various sectors. SADC region's strong legal and policy frameworks, coupled with abundant natural resources including minerals, present a conducive environment for trade and investment opportunities to thrive.

Indeed, where SADC is today, resonates with the words of one of our founding fathers, the late President, Sir Seretse Khama's concluding statement during the Mulungushi Summit in 1980, in Lusaka, Zambia, where he said; ***"We move forward in unity, or we perish,"***.

As a united Community with 16 Member States, with a combined GDP of about US\$720 billion, and a combined population of over 360 million people, of which 74.6 are youths, we have a huge market for investment and economic development.

Your Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I was happy to note, during my meeting with the Management Team this morning, that, although SADC has not moved beyond the Free Trade Area (FTA) stage to actualise the Customs Union and Common Market as per envisaged timeline, SADC has the highest intra-regional trade at 23% of total trade with the rest of the world. This is proof that the region is making progress with regard to implementing the FTA and achieving the ultimate objective of trade integration.

SADC has achieved minimum conditions for the SADC Free Trade Area with 85 percent of tariffs on goods zero rated for all countries. I am pleased to note that SADC has recorded other notable achievements such as improvement of regional power supply through the establishment of the Southern African Power Pool; and improvement in transboundary cooperation and management of water resources through the establishment of River Basin Organizations; and a general increase in the participation of women in decision-making.

Your Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen,

While the SADC region has achieved several milestones since its inception, it is clear from the feedback we get at times, that most of the citizens on the ground have limited

knowledge about SADC, its role, mandate and subsequently its achievements and benefits to the region. This low knowledge about SADC has led to a mismatch between public expectations and the actual SADC programmes and their implementation on the ground. Let me take this opportunity to encourage officials in SADC Member States, including, the SADC Ambassadors and High Commissioners across the globe, and the media, to participate in increasing the level of knowledge about SADC. SADC is still relevant and will for a long time to come. SADC is our vehicle for promoting regional integration, economic and social-political development of our community.

Your Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen,

My visit to Botswana also comes at a time when the world, including in our region, continue to contend with the effects of the COVID 19 pandemic whose size, severity, and complexity is unprecedented. Uncertainties and risks still weigh heavily on our economies. In addition, high inflation, the cost-of-living crisis and slower growth are affecting everyone, including hurting the poor and most vulnerable. Record high debt is holding back developing countries, and the effects of climate change are threatening lives and livelihoods around the world including our region. Moreover, the Ukraine-Russian conflict and geopolitical fragmentation are making regional and international coordination even more challenging.

Policy frameworks have become more complex. As a result, there is a danger that focus can tilt towards short term solutions rather than long term solutions or urgent issues at the expense of important durable ones. There is need for a proper mix of policies taking into account all risks including those emanating from climate change.

Your Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen,

You will recall, the 42nd Summit endorsed “***Promoting industrialization through, agro-processing, mineral beneficiation, and regional value chains for inclusive and resilient economic growth***” as a theme for the year. The Theme takes into account the current operating environment and the need to enhance the roll out of the SADC industrialisation and market integration programmes as contained in our Strategy, the **Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan for 2020-2030**. The Theme also takes forward the implementation of the SADC Industrialisation Strategy

and Roadmap that will help SADC economies to diversify and move away from dependence on primary commodities, such as raw minerals and agriculture products into high-value manufactured goods.

Your Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I assumed my term of office as Chairperson of SADC when a solid foundation had been laid for re-orienting our priorities within the framework of the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) 2020-2030, in order to deepen regional integration and achieve sustainable development. The RISDP envisions a peaceful, middle to high income industrialised region, where all citizens enjoy sustainable economic well-being, justice, and freedom. This means our efforts will focus on working towards consolidating the Community by leveraging areas of excellence and implementing priorities to achieve inclusive, sustainable, and inclusive socio-economic development, removal of all barriers to deeper integration, good governance and durable peace and security guided by the principles of the SADC Treaty and Agenda.

I am pleased to note that, in order to consolidate the implementation of the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan, we have just completed the reprioritisation of projects within the RISDP so that we can focus on projects and programmes that are critical and impactful.

Ours is an important task of carrying with us the aspirations of SADC citizens which include enjoying sustainable economic well-being, justice and freedom. This therefore means that we should be unrelenting in expending our energies and channelling our resources towards the realisation of the aspirations of our founding fathers. It is my hope that despite the challenges before us, the Vision 2050 and RISDP 2020-30 prioritised projects will continue to infuse in us a fresh impetus and a renewed sense of purpose and urgency in our work towards increased regional integration and development.

Your Excellency, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Realizing that more still needs to be done collectively, I count on you, Executive Secretary and your team, to continue as you have demonstrated, working diligently on the various programmes and projects that respond to some of the challenges our

region is facing as well as finding worthwhile solutions to these. Notwithstanding the challenges before us, we also need to showcase impactful and tangible progress in poverty eradication, sustainable growth and development, through various regional programmes, which are aligned with national policies and strategies, continental and global development processes such as the African Union Agenda 2063 and the United Nations Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development.

Let me also underscore that, the achievements the region has recorded thus far and our collective aspirations, cannot be realized without a strong, well-structured and able Secretariat. In this context, the challenge I bring to the Secretariat is to endeavour to do more with less. This requires strong stewardship, creativity and innovation that will optimize existing capacity. While our burden as Member States remains to ensure adequate funding and overall support for the SADC Programmes, it is incumbent upon all of us to make judicious use of these scarce resources.

In conclusion, I wish to thank you, Executive Secretary and the SADC Secretariat Staff for your professionalism, dedication, and commitment to the implementation of SADC programmes. I call upon all of you to renew and rededicate your commitment to the execution of your duties, and I urge you to continue working hard in order to expeditiously implement SADC Summit Decisions, for the benefit of the citizens of SADC.

Merci beaucoup.

I thank you.

Muito obrigado.

Asante Sana