

SADC DAY MESSAGE

It is with great honour and humility that I extend to you my best wishes on the SADC Day 2023. This day has become an annual commemoration since the historic decision of the 14th SADC Summit in August 1994 to declare 17 August as SADC Day in honour of the good work done by our organisation to promote development and unity in the Region.

Since its establishment in 1980, SADC has consistently demonstrated unfailing solidarity and unity in addressing the many challenges facing the Region. The Region enjoys relatively stable peace and security, despite recurrent threats to the security of some SADC Member States, including the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Mozambique, where armed groups continue to cause untold suffering among civilians, particularly women and children. In this regard, I would like to acknowledge the dedication and leadership of His Excellency Dr Hage Geingob, President of the Republic of Namibia and Chairperson of the SADC Organ on Political, Defence and Security Cooperation, as well as the dedication shown by the staff of various regional structures, who bear a crucial responsibility and contribute tirelessly to ensuring that our Region remains peaceful and stable.

Despite some challenges, our Region continues to do well, as shown by the African Union Commission's Multidimensional Regional Integration Index, which gave SADC a high score for regional integration, particularly in terms of financial, infrastructural, trade and environmental integration.

Considering where SADC is today, I think the words spoken by one of our founding fathers, the late President Mr Seretse Khama of the Republic of Botswana, who in his closing remarks at the historic Mulungushi Summit in Lusaka, Zambia, where our regional organisation was established in 1980, still ring true: "Either we move forward together, or we perish".

As a united regional community of 16 member states, with a combined gross domestic product of around \$720 billion and a total population of over 360 million, 75% of whom are young people, we have a market with considerable potential for investment and economic development.

Since its establishment, the SADC Region has achieved a number of milestones that we should be proud of. Let me take this opportunity to encourage SADC Member State officials, including SADC Ambassadors and High Commissioners around the world, as well as the media, to intensify their efforts to raise awareness of SADC, its role, mandate and achievements. SADC is still relevant and will remain so for a long time to come. It allows us to promote regional integration and the economic and socio-political development of our Community.

As our Region and the rest of the world still face the effects of natural disasters and emergencies, we should continue to ensure that SADC comes out stronger and more resilient from the crisis caused by these disasters and emergencies. Uncertainties and risks still weigh heavily on our economies, with high inflation, weak growth and the effects of climate change affecting lives and livelihoods.

Industrialisation is a priority for our Region, as it is necessary to support regional integration. In this regard, for the 42nd Ordinary Summit of the SADC in 2022, the DRC has focused on the theme "*Promoting industrialisation through agro-processing, mineral beneficiation and regional value-chains for inclusive and resilient economic growth*".

This theme took into account the need to improve the deployment of SADC's industrialisation and market integration programmes, as set out in SADC Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP, 2020-2030). The theme was also intended to drive forward the implementation of the SADC Industrialisation Strategy and Roadmap, which would help the region's economies diversify away from dependence on primary commodities, such as raw minerals and agricultural products, and focus on high value-added manufactured goods. I am delighted that the theme for the coming year, "*Human and Financial Capital: The Key Drivers for Sustainable Industrialisation in the SADC Region*", as proposed by the incoming SADC Chair, the Republic of Angola, will enable our Region to continue to drive forward the industrialisation agenda by developing, mobilising and harnessing human and financial capital.

We have the daunting task of ensuring that the aspirations of SADC citizens for sustainable economic well-being, justice and freedom are met. This means that we should relentlessly deploy our energies and channel our resources towards realising the aspirations of our founders.

As we commemorate SADC Day 2023, let us all reflect on the progress we have made as a Region so that our children can live in an even better Region than the one we inherited from our Founders. The joy of our generation will surely be even greater on the day when inclusive cultural activities such as "Miss SADC", "SADC Games", will expedite the brotherhood between our children and grandchildren across our borders, in a fully pacified and prosperous region.

I wish you all a happy SADC Day.

H.E. President Félix-Antoine TSHISEKEDI TSHILOMBO
PRESIDENT OF THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO AND PRESIDENT OF SADC