



STATEMENT

BY

SADC DEPUTY EXECUTIVE SECRETARY FOR CORPORATE AFFAIRS

DR JUDITH KATHEERA

ON THE OCCASION OF

THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF

**THE MEETING OF SADC MINISTERS RESPONSIBLE FOR GENDER/
WOMEN'S AFFAIRS**

27 JUNE 2025

HARARE

REPUBLIC OF ZIMBABWE

Director of Ceremonies;

Minister of Women Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprises Development of the Republic of Zimbabwe, and Chairperson of Ministers Responsible for Gender and Women's Affairs, Honourable Senator Monica Mutsvangwa.

Honourable Ministers, Deputy Ministers and Your Representatives responsible for Gender and Women's Affairs.

Members of Parliament of the Republic of Zimbabwe.

Your Excellencies SADC Ambassadors and High Commissioners accredited to the Republic of Zimbabwe, and the entire Diplomatic Corp here present.

The Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Women Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprises Development of the Republic of Zimbabwe and Chairperson of Senior Officials Responsible for Gender and Women's Affairs, Dr. Mavis Sibanda,

Members of Staff from the Government of the Republic of Zimbabwe.

SADC Senior Officials Responsible for Gender and Women's Affairs.

Representatives of the United Nations Agencies and all Development Partners here present.

Heads and Representatives of Civil Society Organisations.

Colleagues from the SADC Secretariat, led by Ms. Phemelo Maiketso, Head of the Gender Unit at the SADC Secretariat.

Members of the Media.

Distinguished Delegates, Invited Guests, ladies and Gentlemen.

All protocols observed.

Good morning to you all.

Honourable Ministers, I am honoured to extend warm greetings from His Excellency Mr. Elias Magosi, the SADC Executive Secretary, who has assigned me to represent him at this meeting.

It is therefore a great honour and privilege indeed, for me to address you today as I present the progress that has been made in the implementation of the SADC Gender Programme, but before I do that, allow me to extend sincere appreciation to the SADC Chair, and the Government of the Republic of Zimbabwe

for their warm hospitality, and for organizing and hosting this important meeting with such dedication and excellence.

Honourable Ministers, you may wish to note that today's meeting is coming at an opportune moment when the SADC Secretariat has just embarked on the Mid Term Review (MTR) of our regional development plan, the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Programme (RISDP 2020-2030). Through this review exercise, we seek to take stock of work done in the past five years (2020 – 2025), consider the unfinished agenda, as well as refocus into the future (2025 – 2030) as we redefine our regional priorities in terms of our objectives, what we seek to deliver to the SADC citizens and how we intend to fund all our activities. It goes without saying that all this work will be done with a gender lens for us to realise transformative and impactful outcomes in our region, Southern Africa. I therefore seize this opportunity to strongly encourage you to participate in this MTR exercise, making practical contributions once approached by your Secretariat. This review exercise will be undertaken with empowerment of women and girls in mind.

Having said that, I wish to underscore the fact that the SADC region has placed on high priority, achievement of gender equality and empowerment of women and girls. This has been and continues to be a central ambition of the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development. Gender is a key priority within the SADC Programme of Action and the Regional Integration Agenda.

Not only that, gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, continue to be central priority in the SADC region, with these commitments clearly anchored in the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development. This is further reflected in the recognition and importance we place on gender as an important cross-cutting issue, and an enabler for regional integration, as outlined in the SADC Treaty, the SADC Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP 2020-2030) and the SADC Vision 2050.

As we gather here today, Honourable Ministers, we all look forward to productive engagement as we reflect on critical areas, including the following:

The Regional Gender Performance: While we have seen encouraging progress in women's participation in politics, the public sector, judiciary, and state-owned enterprises, challenges remain. Gender-Based Violence (GBV) continues to be alarmingly high, with women and girls disproportionately affected. Ministers are urged to strengthen the implementation and financing of prevention initiatives that tackle the root causes of GBV.

Honourable Ministers, the Secretariat has conducted a review of the 2008-2015 Framework on Achieving Gender Parity in politics and Decision making as well as the Regional Strategy and Framework of Action for Addressing Gender Based Violence. The 2008-2015 Framework for Achieving Gender Parity is now

outdated and requires revision to address the ongoing challenges and to reflect normative development at both the SADC regional and global level, since 2008. This Framework serves to provide guidance and tools for Member States to support women's political participation.

Furthermore, the Secretariat has completed a **Mid Term Review of the GBV Strategy (2018-2030)**. The purpose of this review was to identify key lessons, highlight best practices, emerging issues and develop recommendations to strengthen our efforts going forward. The Strategy aims to facilitate the implementation and monitoring of the SADC response to GBV, offering guidance at both regional and Member State levels. This includes supporting a holistic and coordinated approach towards addressing GBV. In light of this, the Secretariat will present the two draft Frameworks for your consideration and adoption.

Regarding the SADC Gender Programme Review: I would like to commend the Republic of South Africa for signing the revised Protocol on Gender and Development and encourage the Republic of Mauritius to finalise its processes to do likewise. Efforts to mainstreaming gender have begun across SADC structures, including targeted training initiatives within the peace and security sectors. The Secretariat has also initiated the implementation of the Gender Equality Seal for Public Institutions, beginning with three directorates. This phased approach is designed to promote sustainable and lasting impact.

Honourable Ministers, Distinguished Delegates, I now wish to turn to the topic on **Women's Economic Empowerment**. I wish to state that the SADC Regional Multi-Dimensional Women's Economic Empowerment Programme (RMD-WEEP) continues to make strides, with regional conferences creating vital platforms for advancing women's entrepreneurship and leadership. A lot more still needs to be desired in the areas of sustainable concessional funding to empower SADC women in a practical and progressing manner. The second phase of RISDP seeks to ensure that this empowerment is realised indeed.

Distinguished Chair, on **Gender Statistics and Financial Inclusion**, it has been noted that the launch of a Gender Statistics Toolkit, along with capacity-building, and peer-learning initiatives have been instrumental in improving data collection to support inclusive policy-making. Despite these advances, the lack of gender-disaggregated financial data remains a significant gap that requires attention, for us to witness significant improvement in women's access to finance.

Regarding **Women, Peace and Security Agenda**, half of our Member States have developed national action plans on United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR 1325), while others are making commendable progress with the support of the Secretariat. The recent establishment of the *Network of Women*

***Mediators in Southern Africa* presents an important milestone in recognising the vital role of women in peacebuilding efforts.**

Honourable Ministers, while our region has established some of the most progressive **policies and frameworks, the implementation and enforcement of laws by Member States has been notably low. Member States are therefore, urged to fully implement the Regional Frameworks developed and adopted by the SADC Secretariat, in order for us to successfully promote gender equality and women's empowerment. This highlights the importance of accelerating integration of these initiatives into national frameworks and legislation, and hence facilitate effective implementation.**

Before concluding, Honourable Ministers, allow me to express my sincere gratitude to all the Honourable Ministers who have taken time to attend this important regional meeting, despite their demanding schedules and other national priorities.

I further extend my appreciation to the International Cooperating Partners (ICPs) and Civil Society Organizations for their continued support in advancing the priorities outlined in the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan 2020-2030, particularly in promoting and enhancing gender equality and women's empowerment initiatives.

I would like to acknowledge and express deep appreciation for the good work done by the Chairperson of the Senior Officials, Dr. Mavis Sibanda, through her effective leadership as she chaired the Senior Officials' meetings, a meeting that ensured the thorough preparation of documents for this Ministerial meeting.

Furthermore, I extend my gratitude to our dedicated Senior Officials, alongside the many partners and stakeholders, including all other experts who have been working behind the scenes, for the excellent work that has been undertaken over time, and especially the past two days, leading to the convening of this important meeting we are having today. The same goes without saying to the organizing committee and the SADC Secretariat for their diligent preparations for this meeting.

As we move forward, Honourable Ministers, let us introspect and challenge ourselves with the question regarding source of funding for our empowerment programmes, given the recent geopolitical and developments and on the international financial platform. Where does the money come from to fund all our activities as pronounced in the decision we make? This is a mega question we seek to address through your Secretariat as we explore various innovative and alternative financing options. These financing options must ensure that every SADC Member State is capacitated to implement the decisions that we make at such important meetings. We now need to move away from some

rhetoric in our empowerment programmes, to practical action that leaves no Member State behind.

I strongly encourage that we reaffirm our commitment to creating a region where gender equality is not merely an objective but a lived reality for every woman and girl in the SADC region. I strongly encourage that we strengthen our partnerships, harmonise policies, invest in robust data, and fulfil our promises. Together, we can ensure that no one is left behind on the path to inclusive and equitable regional development.

Honourable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen.

With these remarks, I wish us all very fruitful deliberations. May God bless the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC). May He bless us all.

I thank you all for your kind attention.

Thank you!

Merci beaucoup!

Muito obrigado!

Asante sana!

Tatenda!

Siyabonga !