



OFFICIAL OPENING STATEMENT

BY

CHAIRPERSON

HONOURABLE SENATOR MONICA MUTSVANGWA

**MINISTRY OF WOMEN AFFAIRS, COMMUNITY, SMALL AND MEDIUM
ENTERPRISES DEVELOPMENT, REPUBLIC OF ZIMBABWE**

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

27 JUNE 2025

HARARE, ZIMBABWE

Your Excellencies, Distinguished SADC Ministers of Gender and Women Affairs and Heads of Delegations;
Representatives from the Parliament of Zimbabwe,
Dr. Judith Kateera, the SADC Deputy Executive Secretary responsible for Corporate Affairs;
Dr. Mavis Sibanda and the Permanent Secretaries here present
Senior Government Officials;
UN Agencies UN Women Regional and Country Offices, as well as UNFPA
International Cooperating Partners present here
The Women's Civil Society Organisation Umbrella body in Zimbabwe-the Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe
Civil Society Organisations;
Distinguished Delegates;
Members of the media;
Ladies and Gentlemen;

1. It is an honour to welcome you all to Zimbabwe for this important meeting of the SADC Ministers of Gender and Women Affairs.
2. As we convene today, I reflect on our previous engagement during the Beijing +30 celebrations at the 69th Session of the

Commission on the Status of Women in New York this past March. Our collaboration was remarkable and impactful. Your contributions significantly enhanced Zimbabwe's effectiveness in fulfilling its strategic representation responsibilities as the SADC chair at that global platform. I am grateful for the strong support each of you provided.

3. As a region, we have made firm commitments to achieve gender equality, demonstrated by the adoption and subsequent revision of the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development in 2016. This framework is not merely an aspiration; it is a solemn obligation that we must fulfil together.
4. It is commendable to note that guided by this framework, the SADC region has made significant strides in promoting gender equality, and we are regarded as a progressive leader and benchmark for gender equality and development by many countries.
 - i. Notable initiatives to prevent and respond to Gender-Based Violence are in place across all member states.
 - ii. While we are yet to reach the 50% benchmark, significant progress has been made in promoting women's participation in leadership and decision-making. Many member states have implemented special measures to enhance women's participation. It

is momentous that we celebrate the inauguration of another female president in the SADC region, Her Excellency Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah. Additionally, we are proud to recognise our own Hon. Kirsty Coventry of Zimbabwe, elected as the first female president of the International Olympic Committee, making her the first African and the youngest to hold this powerful role.

iii. I also want to acknowledge the efforts of various member states in promoting women's economic empowerment, which have positively impacted the economic status of women in the region.

iv. Our appreciation also goes to the Secretariat, which has been instrumental in supporting member states through various capacity-building initiatives.

5. **Hon. Ministers and Esteemed Delegates**, while we celebrate those milestones, we are at a pivotal moment that calls for bold action to tackle both common and emerging challenges.

6. The review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, recently, at the 69th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW69), showed that although a lot of progress has been made, most Countries including the Southern Africa region is

not on track to meet the SDGs and ensure full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and its Platform for Action.

- i. GBV represents a critical barrier to the achievement of gender equality and sustainable development in Southern Africa,
- ii. The low representation of women in politics and decision-making, with most Member States in the SADC region falling short of achieving the 50/50 target, also poses a huge hindrance to the attainment of gender equality in the region.
- iii. A lot also needs to be done to integrate digital literacy, automation, and emerging technologies into school curricula for the achievement of gender equality in education and training.
- iv. HIV/AIDS is still an area of concern, noting that our region bears 44% of the HIV infections, with most affected being women and girls.

Hon. Ministers and Esteemed Delegates

7. While we continue to confront those challenges, it is also crucial to recognise the current threats to the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment agenda,
 - i. The world is witnessing an unprecedented backlash on gender equality, which threatens to wipe away all the gains we have made since Beijing. We must therefore reaffirm the centrality of gender equality in our discussions and actions, standing firm against any attempts to erode the advancements we have made.
 - ii. The implications of declining funding also pose a significant threat to sustaining our hard-won gains. Unfortunately, as developing countries grapple with the implications of an unpredictable and fast-changing funding landscape, gender equality and women's empowerment is likely to be a low financial priority.
8. **WE CANNOT BE COMPLACENT**, knowing that our region cannot achieve meaningful social and economic development while leaving more than half of its population behind.
9. This fact should be a stark reminder of our collective responsibility to chart a strategic course for advancing gender equality in our region.

10. **The time is now for us to strategically shape the future** of our region by focusing on the following key avenues:

i. Revitalisation of CSW as a Pathway to:

- Strengthen global accountability, reinforce coherence across UN bodies, and ensure that the CSW remains fit for purpose to deliver on Beijing+30 and the SDGs.
- Promote stronger linkages between CSW and other UN intergovernmental bodies (including CEDAW, Human Rights Council, ECOSOC, and Regional Commissions) to avoid fragmentation and strengthen coherence.
- Support the continued role of UN Women to facilitate system-wide coordination in support of Member States' preparations, reporting, and implementation of CSW outcomes.

The CSW Revitalisation Zero Draft document of 28 May 2025 is now under informal consultation by Member States in New York. Let us lead as SADC and ensure that our Ministries of Foreign Affairs and UN Missions in New York are fully informed and engaged in this important process.

ii. The High-Level Meeting on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment at UNGA80 further offers a rare political moment

for Africa to demonstrate leadership in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. The world is watching how we translate Beijing+30 into real, financed national actions. I call upon all SADC Member States to prepare and announce ambitious, time-bound, fully financed national commitments at this unique opportunity during UNGA80.

iii. **Transforming domestic resource mobilisation** to sustain gains in gender equality and women's empowerment is another essential strategy for ensuring the sustainability of our initiatives. Now more than ever, our governments must ring-fence funding for gender equality, women's rights, and empowerment. Zimbabwe has already initiated the process of assessing the economic costs of Gender-Based Violence to inform funding models that will help harness local resources for prevention and response programs. I encourage other member states to consider similar initiatives.

iv. **It is equally important that we intensify efforts** for the active engagement of men and boys in promoting positive masculinity and eliminating harmful norms, values, and practices that disadvantage women and girls.

v. **Another critical element is the need to accelerate the momentum** to sustain regional progress in women's participation in politics and decision-making positions

vi. **Changing the trajectory and narrative of our regional peace and security challenges**, as guided by United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security, cannot be overemphasised.

vii. **We can solidify our efforts by strengthening our commitment** and accountability to gender equality and women's empowerment normative frameworks. We acknowledge the recently adopted African Union Convention on Ending Violence against Women (AUCEVAWG), which is a significant milestone for Africa in addressing violence against women and girls within our context. As a region, we must lead in the ratification and domestication of this important framework.

Additionally, given that HIV remains a pressing challenge in the SADC Region, we should ensure that our own SADC-sponsored UN Resolution 60/2 on Women, the Girl Child, and HIV and AIDS, which is due for presentation at the CSW in 2026, is maintained. I trust that we all share the desire to see this resolution adopted for rollover by consensus.

11. Once again, welcome to Zimbabwe. Mauya, Sethule, Karibuni, Bienvenue, Benvindo, Ben-vinda.

12. I now declare this Ministerial meeting of Ministers of Gender and Women Affairs officially open and wish you all successful and impactful deliberations.