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**REPUBLIC OF ZAMBIA  
MINISTRY OF GREEN ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT**

**OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE 31ST SOUTHERN AFRICA  
REGIONAL CLIMATE OUTLOOK FORUM  
(SARCOF-31)**

**SPEECH BY**

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MINISTER OF GREEN ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT**

**INTERCONTINENTAL HOTEL, LUSAKA**

**8<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER 2025**

- **THE DISASTER MANAGEMENT AND MITIGATION UNIT (DMMU) NATIONAL COORDINATOR, AND PERMANENT SECRETARIES HERE PRESENT**
- **DIRECTOR OF INFRASTRUCTURE AT THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY (SADC) MS. MAPOLAO ROSEMARY MOKOENA**
- **DIRECTOR OF METEOROLOGY, MR. EDSON NKONDE**
- **SENIOR GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS**
- **DISTINGUISHED CLIMATE EXPERTS FROM SADC MEMBER STATES**
- **REPRESENTATIVES OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS**
- **REPRESENTATIVES OF MEDIA HOUSES**
- **DISTINGUISHED GUESTS**

**LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,**

IT GIVES ME GREAT PLEASURE, ON BEHALF OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF ZAMBIA, TO WELCOME YOU ALL TO LUSAKA FOR THE 31ST SOUTHERN AFRICA REGIONAL CLIMATE OUTLOOK FORUM (SARCOF-31). THIS IS A MOMENT OF IMMENSE PRIDE FOR OUR NATION AS WE HOST THE REGION'S LEADING CLIMATE SCIENTISTS, POLICYMAKERS, AND PRACTITIONERS IN THIS CRUCIAL FORUM.

THE THEME FOR THIS YEAR'S MEETING, **"AT THE FRONTLINE OF**

**CLIMATE ACTION TOWARDS IMPROVED CLIMATE SERVICES IN THE SADC REGION,”** CAPTURES THE URGENCY OF OUR TASK. WE STAND AT A DEFINING MOMENT WHERE CLIMATE CHANGE IS NO LONGER A DISTANT THREAT, BUT A HARSH REALITY FOR OUR FARMERS, OUR CITIES, OUR BUSINESSES, AND OUR HOUSEHOLDS.

**LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,**

SARCOF HAS A PROUD HISTORY. IT WAS BORN IN THE LATE 1990S, AFTER THE DEVASTATING **1997/98 EL NIÑO**, WHICH SHOCKED OUR REGION WITH SEVERE DROUGHT AND WIDESPREAD FOOD INSECURITY. AT THAT TIME, SADC LEADERS RECOGNIZED THAT WE COULD NO LONGER AFFORD TO REACT TO DISASTERS ONLY AFTER THEY OCCURRED. THERE WAS AN URGENT NEED FOR FORESIGHT AND REGIONAL COOPERATION.

FROM THOSE BEGINNINGS, SARCOF HAS GROWN INTO A RESPECTED ANNUAL FORUM. NOW IN ITS 31ST SESSION, IT PROVIDES SEASONAL CLIMATE OUTLOOKS THAT ARE VITAL FOR GOVERNMENTS, FARMERS, ENERGY PLANNERS, AND HUMANITARIAN ACTORS.

IT HAS BECOME A CORNERSTONE OF THE **GLOBAL FRAMEWORK**

**FOR CLIMATE SERVICES (GFCS)** AND IS ALIGNED WITH THE **SADC REGIONAL INDICATIVE STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN (RISDP 2020–2030)**. IN SHORT, SARCOF IS NO LONGER JUST A TECHNICAL MEETING OF METEOROLOGISTS, IT IS A STRATEGIC INSTITUTION OF RESILIENCE, BRINGING SCIENCE AND POLICY TOGETHER IN SERVICE OF OUR PEOPLE.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS FORUM BECOMES CLEARER WHEN WE REFLECT ON THE CLIMATE EXTREMES THAT HAVE STRUCK OUR REGION IN RECENT YEARS.

DURING THE 2015/16 EL NIÑO DROUGHT, OVER 40 MILLION PEOPLE WERE LEFT FOOD INSECURE ACROSS SADC. COUNTRIES WERE FORCED TO IMPORT MAIZE AT HIGH COST, AND GOVERNMENTS SPENT BILLIONS OF DOLLARS ON EMERGENCY RELIEF. THIS WAS NOT ONLY A HUMANITARIAN CRISIS BUT A CRISIS OF DEVELOPMENT.

THE **2019 CYCLONE IDAI** WAS ONE OF THE STRONGEST CYCLONES EVER RECORDED IN THE SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE. MOZAMBIQUE, MALAWI, AND ZIMBABWE WERE DEVASTATED. MORE THAN **2 MILLION PEOPLE** WERE AFFECTED, WITH ECONOMIC LOSSES EXCEEDING **USD 2 BILLION**. CYCLONE IDAI

DESTROYED ROADS, SCHOOLS, AND HOSPITALS, CAUSING SETBACKS THAT WILL TAKE DECADES TO REBUILD.

THE **2023/24 EL NIÑO**, THOUGH TECHNICALLY WEAKER THAN THE 2015/16 EVENT, BROUGHT MORE SEVERE AND WIDESPREAD IMPACTS. SIX COUNTRIES, INCLUDING ZAMBIA, DECLARED NATIONAL STATES OF EMERGENCY. ACCORDING TO THE UNITED NATIONS OFFICE FOR THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS (OCHA), BOTSWANA, NAMIBIA, ZIMBABWE, AND ZAMBIA LOST OVER **9,000 CATTLE**, DEVASTATING RURAL LIVELIHOODS AND FOOD SYSTEMS.

AT THE SAME TIME, PARTS OF MALAWI, MOZAMBIQUE, AND MADAGASCAR WERE INUNDATED BY DESTRUCTIVE FLOODS, DISPLACING COMMUNITIES AND DAMAGING INFRASTRUCTURE. THIS PARADOX OF DROUGHT IN SOME AREAS AND FLOODS IN OTHERS DEMONSTRATES THE COMPLEX NATURE OF CLIMATE CHANGE TODAY.

THESE EXPERIENCES SHOW THAT CLIMATE CHANGE IS NOT SIMPLY ABOUT WEATHER EVENTS; IT IS ABOUT **COMPOUNDED VULNERABILITY**. POVERTY, DEFORESTATION, WEAK INFRASTRUCTURE, AND ECONOMIC FRAGILITY ALL ACT AS

FORCE MULTIPLIERS, TURNING MODERATE SHOCKS INTO DEVASTATING CATASTROPHES.

INDEED, THE WORLD METEOROLOGICAL ORGANIZATION (WMO) REPORTS THAT AFRICA IS ALREADY LOSING 2% - 5% OF ITS GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT (GDP) EACH YEAR TO CLIMATE EXTREMES, WHILE SOME COUNTRIES SPEND AS MUCH AS 9% OF THEIR ANNUAL BUDGETS ON EMERGENCY RESPONSE. THIS IS SIMPLY UNSUSTAINABLE.

**LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,**

IF WE ARE TO REVERSE THIS TREND, THEN CLIMATE SERVICES MUST BE OUR FRONTLINE ARMOUR.

LET ME ILLUSTRATE WITH SOME PRACTICAL EXAMPLES.

- IN AGRICULTURE, A FARMER IN ZAMBIA'S EASTERN PROVINCE WHO KNOWS THE LIKELY START OF THE RAINS, THE PROBABILITY OF DRY SPELLS, AND THE EXPECTED SEASONAL RAINFALL CAN DECIDE WHETHER TO PLANT MAIZE, MILLET, OR GROUNDNUTS. WITHOUT THIS INFORMATION, ONE FALSE START CAN devastate the entire community.

- FOR ENERGY, HYDROPOWER DAMS AT **KARIBA** OR **CAHORA BASSA** DEPEND ON RAINFALL FORECASTS. IN YEARS OF DROUGHT, ELECTRICITY SHORTAGES RIPPLE ACROSS BORDERS, AFFECTING BUSINESSES, SCHOOLS, AND HOSPITALS. ACCURATE SEASONAL FORECASTS HELP OPERATORS PLAN AHEAD, REDUCING BLACKOUTS.
- FOR WATER, IN NAMIBIA AND BOTSWANA, RAINFALL PREDICTIONS GUIDE WATER MANAGERS ON HOW TO RATION SCARCE SUPPLIES AND PREPARE FOR DROUGHT.
- FOR HEALTH, IN TANZANIA AND MOZAMBIQUE, FORECASTS ALLOW HEALTH MINISTRIES TO PRE-POSITION MEDICINES AGAINST CLIMATE-SENSITIVE DISEASES SUCH AS MALARIA, CHOLERA, AND EVEN HEAT STRESS.
- FOR DISASTER MANAGEMENT, IN MADAGASCAR, CYCLONE FORECASTS GIVE COMMUNITIES PRECIOUS HOURS TO EVACUATE, SAVING LIVES AND LIVELIHOODS.

THESE ARE NOT THEORETICAL BENEFITS. THEY ARE REAL, PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS THAT TRANSFORM **FORECASTS INTO PROTECTION, AND FORESIGHT INTO PREPAREDNESS.**

HOWEVER, DESPITE OUR PROGRESS, GAPS REMAIN. A RECENT STUDY SHOWS THAT WHILE ALL SADC COUNTRIES HAVE EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS, THEY ARE OFTEN characterised by the following challenges AS FOLLOWS.

- FIRSTLY, THEY ARE FRAGMENTED. AGENCIES TEND TO OPERATE IN ISOLATION, EACH GOVERNED BY SEPARATE LAWS AND MANDATES, WHICH LIMITS COORDINATION AND EFFICIENCY.
- SECONDLY, THEY ARE UNDER-RESOURCED. MANY SYSTEMS LACK QUALIFIED PERSONNEL, MODERN EQUIPMENT, AND UPDATED HAZARD MAPS, ESSENTIAL TOOLS FOR ACCURATE AND TIMELY FORECASTING, AND
- THIRDLY, THEY ARE NOT SUFFICIENTLY PEOPLE CENTRED. FORECASTS OFTEN STOP AT NATIONAL BULLETINS AND FAIL TO REACH THE RURAL FARMERS, FISHERS, AND HERDERS WHO DEPEND ON THIS INFORMATION TO PROTECT THEIR LIVELIHOODS.

THIS “**LAST MILE PROBLEM**” IS THE ACHILLES’ HEEL OF OUR EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS. A FORECAST THAT DOES NOT REACH THE FARMER IN GWEMBE, THE FISHER IN LAKE MALAWI, OR THE HERDER IN KALAHARI IS A FORECAST WASTED.

THIS IS WHY THE WORK OF SARCOF-31, PARTICULARLY THE VALIDATION OF THE SADC MULTI-HAZARD EARLY WARNING SYSTEM (MHEWS), IS SO CRITICAL. THIS SYSTEM WILL HARMONIZE FRAGMENTED EFFORTS, INTEGRATE MULTIPLE HAZARDS, AND ENSURE EARLY WARNINGS ARE PEOPLE-CENTRED, ACTIONABLE, AND ACCESSIBLE IN LOCAL LANGUAGES.

**LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,**

ZAMBIA IS NOT ONLY PROUD TO HOST THIS FORUM, WE ARE ALSO TAKING BOLD NATIONAL STEPS TO ADVANCE CLIMATE RESILIENCE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH TARGETED INITIATIVES.

ONE SUCH INITIATIVE IS THE FACE-NDC PROJECT, SUPPORTED BY €17 MILLION FROM GERMANY'S INTERNATIONAL CLIMATE INITIATIVE. THROUGH THIS PROJECT, WE AIM TO EMPOWER 2 MILLION ZAMBIANS WITH THE SKILLS NEEDED TO THRIVE IN A LOW-CARBON, CLIMATE-RESILIENT ECONOMY. IT IS A DIRECT INVESTMENT IN OUR PEOPLE, OUR YOUTH, AND THE FUTURE WORKFORCE THAT WILL DRIVE ZAMBIA'S GREEN TRANSITION.

ANOTHER TRANSFORMATIVE EFFORT IS THE ECOSYSTEM-BASED ADAPTATION (EBA) PROJECT, FUNDED BY THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT FACILITY (GEF) WITH \$6 MILLION. THROUGH THIS INITIATIVE, WE ARE RESTORING CRITICAL WETLANDS SUCH AS **LUKANGA AND BANGWEULU**, ECOSYSTEMS THAT ARE VITAL FOR AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES, AND WATER SECURITY. THESE WETLANDS ABSORB FLOODWATERS DURING HEAVY RAINS AND PROVIDE ESSENTIAL WATER RESOURCES DURING DROUGHT, ACTING AS NATURAL BUFFERS AGAINST CLIMATE EXTREMES.

THESE INITIATIVES SHOW THAT ZAMBIA VIEWS CLIMATE ACTION NOT AS A BURDEN, BUT AS A PATHWAY TO PROSPERITY, TO GREEN JOBS, FOOD SECURITY, AND SUSTAINABLE GROWTH.

**LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,**

THE SADC REGION HAS THE KNOWLEDGE, THE SCIENTISTS, AND THE INSTITUTIONS TO BUILD RESILIENCE. WHAT WE NEED NOW IS BOLD, COLLECTIVE ACTION.

LET ME HIGHLIGHT THREE PRIORITIES THAT ARE ESSENTIAL FOR ADVANCING CLIMATE RESILIENCE ACROSS OUR REGION.

**FIRST**, WE MUST STRENGTHEN REGIONAL COOPERATION. CYCLONE IDAI WAS A STARK REMINDER THAT NO COUNTRY CAN FACE CLIMATE DISASTERS ALONE. THE RISKS WE FACE ARE SHARED AND SO MUST BE OUR SOLUTIONS. WE NEED TO DEEPEN CROSS-BORDER COLLABORATION BY SHARING DATA, POOLING RESOURCES, AND EXCHANGING EXPERTISE. REGIONAL SOLIDARITY IS NOT OPTIONAL; IT IS THE FOUNDATION OF EFFECTIVE EARLY WARNING AND COORDINATED RESPONSE.

**SECOND**, WE MUST INVEST IN OUR NATIONAL METEOROLOGICAL

AND HYDROLOGICAL SERVICES. THESE INSTITUTIONS ARE THE BACKBONE OF RESILIENCE. THEY PROVIDE THE CRITICAL DATA AND FORECASTS THAT UNDERPIN DISASTER PREPAREDNESS, AGRICULTURAL PLANNING, AND WATER MANAGEMENT. EVERY DOLLAR INVESTED IN THESE SERVICES SAVES MANY MORE BY HELPING US AVOID LOSSES AND PROTECT LIVES. STRENGTHENING THEM IS NOT JUST SMART ECONOMICS, IT IS A MORAL IMPERATIVE.

**THIRD**, WE MUST MAKE CLIMATE SERVICES PEOPLE-CENTRED. SCIENCE MUST SPEAK THE LANGUAGE OF THE PEOPLE. THAT MEANS TRANSLATING FORECASTS INTO SIMPLE, TIMELY, AND LOCALLY RELEVANT ADVICE. WE MUST USE RADIO, SMS, COMMUNITY LEADERS, AND LOCAL LANGUAGES TO REACH THE **LAST MILE**, ESPECIALLY FARMERS, FISHERS, AND VULNERABLE HOUSEHOLDS. WHEN CLIMATE INFORMATION IS ACCESSIBLE, IT BECOMES ACTIONABLE. AND WHEN IT IS ACTIONABLE, IT SAVES LIVES.

**LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,**

THE MESSAGE OF SARCOF-31 IS CLEAR. CLIMATE SERVICES ARE NOT OPTIONAL; THEY ARE THE FRONTLINE OF OUR DEFENCE AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE.

LET US USE THIS FORUM TO COMMIT OURSELVES TO CLOSING THE EARLY WARNING GAP, TO STRENGTHENING OUR COOPERATION, AND TO MAKING SURE THAT NO FARMER, NO FISHER, NO HERDER, AND NO CHILD IS LEFT UNPROTECTED FROM THE STORMS, DROUGHTS, AND FLOODS THAT LIE AHEAD.

ON BEHALF OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF ZAMBIA AND THE MINISTRY OF GREEN ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT, I THANK ALL OUR PARTNERS, SADC, WMO, THE EUROPEAN UNION, AND OUR SCIENTISTS, FOR YOUR DEDICATION. I ALSO EXTEND MY SPECIAL THANKS TO THE INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR TROPICAL AGRICULTURE (CIAT), AND THE PROGRAMME TO INTEGRATE CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION AND RESILIENCE IN AGRO-SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (PIDACC) PROJECT IN ZAMBIA FOR THEIR LOGISTICAL SUPPORT AND ASSISTANCE.

IT IS NOW MY HONOUR AND PRIVILEGE TO DECLARE THE 31ST SOUTHERN AFRICA REGIONAL CLIMATE OUTLOOK FORUM OFFICIALLY OPEN.

I WISH YOU ALL ABUNDANT BLESSINGS.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR KIND ATTENTION.