



Opening Remarks on behalf of SATUCC
SADC Employment and Labour Sector Senior Officials Meeting
24-26 February 2026, Roodepoort, South Africa

Programme Director, allow me to acknowledge,

Honourable Nomakhosazana Meth, Minister of Employment and Labour of the Republic of South Africa and Chairperson of the SADC Ministers of Employment and Labour Sector

Ms. Aggy Moiloa, Deputy Director General of the Republic of South Africa and SADC

Ms. Duduzile Simelane, Director of Social and Human Development, SADC Secretariat

Mr. Yitna Getachew, Director of the Sub-Regional Office for Southern Africa, International Organisation for Migration (IOM)

Mr. Alexio Musindo, Director of the International Labour Organisation (ILO)

Ms. Nester Mukwehwa, on behalf of Ms. Tumi Mbaakanyi, Chairperson of the SADC Private Sector Forum (SPSF)

Distinguished Senior Officials from SADC Member States,

Representatives of the SADC Secretariat,

Our Social Partners from the SADC Private Sector Forum,

Leadership from SATUCC,

Esteemed Colleagues, Friends, and Media here present,

On behalf of the Southern Africa Trade Union Coordination Council – SATUCC –, I extend warm greetings from the over 6 million workers we represent across 15 SADC member states. We thank the Government and people of the Republic of South Africa for hosting this important meeting, and we commend the SADC Secretariat for the meticulous preparations.

I must begin with a sincere apology. Our Executive Secretary, who should be standing before you today, has been unable to attend this meeting due to financial challenges that continue to constrain our organisation. This is not a new story for SATUCC, and it must be told with both honesty and urgency. The very fact that the region's workers cannot be fully represented at this table because of resource limitations speaks to a deeper challenge we must collectively confront: if social dialogue is to be meaningful, social partners must be resourced to participate.

Chair,

We meet at a time of deep contradiction in our region. On paper, we have made notable progress. The SADC Protocol on Employment and Labour has now been signed by ten Member States, we commend Lesotho, Namibia, and Madagascar for their signatures in 2025. We have seen several countries ratify ILO Convention 190 on Violence and Harassment. Botswana has enacted progressive labour legislation after nearly a decade of advocacy. These are achievements we should celebrate.

Yet the lived reality of workers across Southern Africa tells a different story.

Our report, submitted for your review, highlights what workers face daily. In Eswatini, trade unionists deal with a culture of impunity, with the murder of Mr. Thulani Maseko still unresolved, and union leaders experiencing harassment and intimidation. In Zimbabwe, workers in Chinese-owned companies report conditions that can only be described as slaverylike, including fatal shootings, physical abuse, and wages that cannot support a basic standard of living. In Malawi, 264,000 workers in the tobacco industry remain trapped in tenancy arrangements that the ILO has identified as carrying a "heightened risk of forced labour."

We must express that these are not isolated incidents. These are systemic failures.

The 2026 ILO Committee of Experts Report, the highest authority overseeing international labour standards, confirms everything our affiliates have reported. It verifies violations of freedom of association in Angola, where union leaders are arrested and dismissed. It affirms the existence of excessive restrictions on trade union rights in Tanzania. It also confirms the killing of trade unionists in South Africa, with investigations still unresolved.

This is our reality.

But we also bring hope. The Decent Work in Construction Project, implemented in Mozambique, South Africa, and Zimbabwe, has demonstrated what is possible when we work together. Over 1,000 workers reached through education campaigns, 305 workers recruited into trade unions, 240 small enterprises trained on labour law compliance, and 89 percent of businesses reporting improved working conditions and productivity. The lesson is clear: decent work is not a cost, it is an investment that pays dividends for workers, employers, and economies.

We are encouraged by the progress of the Draft Regional Support Action for Social Dialogue. SATUCC has collaborated closely with the Secretariat and SPSF to develop this Concept Note, which provides a sustainable framework to address the financial challenges that prevent our Executive Secretary from being present today. With an estimated budget of US\$2 million over three years, this initiative aims to strengthen our institutional capacity, decrease our reliance on fragmented project funding, and allow us to fully participate in the regional integration agenda.

We call on Senior Officials to endorse this Concept Note and to help us mobilize the resources needed for its implementation.

Colleagues,

Allow us to speak directly to the issues before you in this meeting.

On the **Protocol on Employment and Labour**, we urge all Member States that have not yet signed – Comoros, DRC, Mauritius, Seychelles, South Africa, and Zambia – to expedite their national processes. To those who have signed, we say: ratification must follow. Workers cannot wait another decade for this instrument to enter into force.

Regarding the Labour Migration Action Plan, we support extending it to 2030. However, an extension alone is not sufficient. We need enforceable protections for migrant workers, portability of social security benefits, and an end to the exploitation documented in our report. The AU Model Law on Labour Migration offers a framework – we call on SADC to align regional instruments with this continental standard.

Regarding ILO Convention 190, we commend Angola, Lesotho, Namibia, Mauritius, South Africa, and Zambia for ratification. We encourage Mozambique and Zimbabwe to finalize their ratification processes, and we call on Botswana, Tanzania, and all other Member States to prioritize this Convention. Ratification should be followed by domestication, accessible complaint mechanisms, and training for labour inspectors and judicial officers.

On **child labour**, the Score Card shows improved alignment, but the statistics remain stagnant. We cannot celebrate policy alignment while children remain in hazardous work. The 43,000 children in Malawi's tobacco industry must be in school, not in the fields.

And on **energy justice**, we make a formal call from this platform. The energy crisis across our region – from loadshedding in South Africa to prolonged outages in Zambia – is not a technical problem. It is the result of three decades of failed neoliberal policies that prioritised privatisation over public service. SATUCC calls for a SADC Regional Conference on Energy Justice, bringing together governments, employers, and trade unions to develop a unified regional energy strategy rooted in public pathways, energy sovereignty, and a just transition that protects workers.

In conclusion,

The theme of South Africa's G20 Presidency – "Fostering Solidarity, Equality, and Sustainability through a New Social Contract" – must not remain just a slogan. The commitments made need to be turned into enforceable national targets with tripartite monitoring mechanisms.

Workers in Southern Africa are not asking for charity. They are demanding what they are entitled to: freedom of association, collective bargaining, safe workplaces, and wages that support a family. They want the laws on paper to be reflected in their everyday lives.

SATUCC stands ready to collaborate with all of you – governments, employers, and the Secretariat – to achieve this. We have shown our dedication through participation in the SUSTAIN Project, work on Employment Impact Assessments, involvement in the Decent Work in Construction Project, and research on the Lobito Corridor. We are not asking for a seat at the

table – we are already here. Our request is for the resources to stay at the table and for our voices to be heard and acted upon.

Let us move from commitment to action. Let us move from mandate to lived reality. The workers of Southern Africa have waited long enough.

I thank you.