



**OPENING REMARKS BY THE CHAIRPERSON
OF THE SADC STANDING COMMITTEE OF SENIOR OFFICIALS,
AMBASSADOR TEBOGO SEKOLO,**

07 MARCH 2026

PRETORIA, REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Your Excellency, Mr. Elias Mpedi Magosi, Executive Secretary of SADC,

SADC Deputy Executive Secretaries,

Distinguished Senior Officials and Experts from Member States,

SADC Secretariat Staff,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning!

It is my singular honour to welcome you to this meeting of the Standing Committee of Senior Officials following a very successful session of Senior Officials and Experts on the Mid-Term Review of the RISDP and the SADC Regional Parliament.

We meet at a time when the global and regional environment remains dynamic, uncertain and dangerous. The international system continues to experience geopolitical tensions, economic volatility, climate-induced shocks and disruptions in global supply chains, all of which have direct implications for developing regions such as ours. In this regard, we welcome the Secretariat's inclusion of an agenda item that allows our Organisation to reflect on the implications of these geopolitical developments. At the same time, momentum toward deeper continental integration, particularly through the implementation of the Second Decade of Agenda 2063 and the African Continental Free Trade Area, continues to reshape Africa's development trajectory.

Across our region, citizens look to our regional organisation to translate commitments into tangible improvements in livelihoods, employment opportunities, entrepreneurship, food security, energy access and resilience to shocks. Our responsibility as Senior Officials is therefore clear: to ensure that the machinery of regional cooperation functions efficiently, responsibly and with measurable results. We serve as the critical link between the strategic direction of our leaders and the effective implementation of regional programmes and policies. Our task therefore is to ensure that regional commitments are anchored in sound policies, translated into results-based plans, supported by sustainable resources, and delivered through efficient institutional processes.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our agenda is both substantive and strategic. Time does not permit me to catalogue every item before us, but it is worth highlighting several key areas. We will consider matters relating to the status of finances of our Organisation, the Resource Mobilisation Framework, the operationalisation of the SADC Regional Development

Fund, as well as internal procedures and project management approaches – all of which are fundamental to the sustainability and effective functioning of our Organisation. Indeed, the breadth of our agenda reflects both the complexity and the significance of our work, reminding us that the decisions we take here will shape the future trajectory of our region.

Equally important on the agenda will be the review of the implementation of decisions taken by Council and Summit. This exercise is essential to strengthening accountability and ensuring that our institutional decisions translate into concrete actions and measurable progress on the ground. These decisions span key priority areas, including regional food and nutrition security, disaster risk management, and the management of health and pandemics, reflecting our collective commitment to strengthening resilience, safeguarding livelihoods and advancing sustainable development for the peoples of the region.

Distinguished Delegates,

Our deliberations will also address institutional and governance matters aimed at strengthening the effectiveness and delivery capacity of our Organisation. These include proposed guidelines for the processing of Memoranda of Understanding and cooperation agreements, efforts to strengthen SADC communication, awareness and visibility, as well as the Mid-Term Review of the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) 2020–2030.

As you are aware, we dedicated two days discussing the RISDP Mid-Term Review. One of the key outcomes of those discussions was agreement on the need to develop a set of high-impact, cross-cutting flagship priorities capable of unlocking regional growth, strengthening climate resilience, accelerating industrialisation and advancing infrastructure connectivity. The detailed formulation of these priorities will be taken forward through the technical workshop proposed for June this year.

This meeting will also reflect on the importance of preserving the region's institutional memory through the development of the Hashim Mbita Documentary, among others. At the same time, the consolidation of peace, security and good governance remains central to our agenda, including through discussions on the SADC Regional Framework on Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development and Transitional Justice. This Framework seeks to provide a coherent regional approach to rebuilding institutions, fostering reconciliation and strengthening the rule of law in communities emerging from conflict.

Colleagues,

Finally, I would like to challenge all of us by posing a few questions—not to dampen our spirits, but to compel us to reflect honestly on the future we seek for our region.

- To start with, are we content with 23% intra-regional trade among us, and do we truly believe that this level of exchange reflects the ambition of our regional integration agenda?
- With manufacturing contributing only 11% to our GDPs, can we realistically expect to compete with other middle-income regions that are rapidly industrialising?
- When it takes approximately 15 days and 22 hours to move goods from the Port of Durban to the Kasumbalesa border in the DRC, can we confidently say that our region is enabling efficient trade and economic growth?
- With about 58 million of our citizens facing food insecurity, can we truly claim to be the guardians of our people's well-being and dignity?
- And when vast stretches of our regional road network remain unpaved, can we genuinely hope to unlock the connectivity and mobility that regional integration demands?

These are very uncomfortable questions, but leadership is about discomfort. It is about confronting realities honestly, making the difficult choices, and committing ourselves to the bold actions required to change the trajectory of our region. If we are to realise the aspirations of regional integration, we must move faster, work smarter together, and ensure that our decisions translate into tangible improvements in the lives of the people of our region. Our deliberations must therefore remain focused, solution-oriented and guided by the collective interests of our region.

Let us approach our work in a spirit of cooperation and shared responsibility, with the objective of presenting clear and well-considered recommendations to the Council of Ministers.

With these words, I declare this meeting open.

Thank you.

Merci Beaucoup.

Muito Obrigado.

Asante sana.