



INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

BY

HIS EXCELLENCY MR. ELIAS M. MAGOSI

SADC EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

ON

THE OCCASION OF THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF

THE SADC COUNCIL OF MINISTERS

PRETORIA, SOUTH AFRICA

12 MARCH 2026

Honourable Mr. Ronald Lamola, Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of the Republic of South Africa, and Chairperson of the SADC Council of Ministers;

Honourable Mr. Mulambo Haimbe, SC, MP, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of Zambia, and Incoming Chairperson of the SADC Council of Ministers;

Honourable Prof. Mthuli Ncube, Minister of Finance, Economic Development and Investment Promotion of the Republic of Zimbabwe, representing Honourable Prof. Amon Murwira, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, and Outgoing Chairperson of the SADC Council of Ministers;

Honourable Ministers and Deputy Ministers;

Ambassador Tebogo Seokolo, Deputy Director-General in the Department of International Relations and Cooperation of the Republic of South Africa, and Chairperson of the SADC Standing Committee of Senior Officials;

Senior Officials from SADC Member States;

Ambassadors and High Commissioners;

SADC Deputy Executive Secretaries;

SADC Secretariat staff, and Staff from the Government of the Republic of South Africa;

Members of the Media;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

Good morning!

It is an honour and an immense privilege to welcome you to this Ordinary Meeting of the SADC Council of Ministers held today, the 12th March 2026, here in Pretoria, the administrative capital of the Republic of South Africa. I wish to thank you sincerely Honourable Ministers for availing time from your busy schedules, to attend this important meeting, which is primarily a budgeting session in our regional calendar. I also wish to extend a very special welcome to the honourable Ministers joining Council physically for the first time, (Democratic Republic of Congo, Malawi, Mauritius, and United Republic of Tanzania). We look forward to benefiting from your insights and newer perspectives, to enrich our deliberations in our quest to achieve deeper regional integration and socio-economic development.

Today, we marvel at the remarkable achievements of the region in the recent past. Just a few months ago, in November last year, South Africa made history by hosting the Group of Twenty (G20) Summit, the first ever on the African soil. This milestone is a resounding declaration and a clear demonstration that Africa is ready to lead global conversations and give direction. That Africa is ready to restore the much-threatened spirit of solidarity and multilateralism that has defined the world for decades. We extend our gratitude to the Government and people of South Africa for this remarkable feat. We also congratulate

South Africa on her election as Chair of the African Union's Peace and Security Council from April 2026 to March 2028, alongside the Kingdom of Lesotho, strengthening the voice and representation of the region in advancing peace, security and stability across the continent.

In the same celebratory spirit, on March 8th, the world celebrated the International Women's Day themed "***Rights. Justice. Action. For ALL Women and Girls.***" In Southern Africa, this theme resonates deeply with the women who cross borders daily to trade and sustain their families, and to those who lead and influence global priorities. As SADC, we are proud to be the only region in Africa currently with two serving female Heads of State, a clear demonstration of the region's commitment to placing women and girls at the centre of our development agenda. To all the women here and across our region: may your courage continue to light the path for generations to come. A happy Women's Month to you all.

On yet another happy note, today marks a milestone for the Republic of Mauritius for attaining 58 years of independence, and 33 of these as a Republic. This journey of resilience and unity should be an inspiration to all of us. Happy Independence Day, Mauritius.

Honourable Ministers, your meeting today is held under the theme of the 45th SADC Summit: "***Advancing Industrialisation, Agricultural Transformation, and Energy Transition for a Resilient SADC.***" This theme reflects our shared commitment to modernising agriculture, investing in clean energy, and building a stronger, self-reliant region.

From the Agricultural transformation perspective, several interventions and actions have been undertaken at the regional and national levels to implement the SADC Industrialisation Strategy and Roadmap 2015-2063 and its Action Plan, as well as to address some factors impeding progress in agro-processing and value addition.

To improve productivity and competitiveness of the agricultural value chain and increased levels of private sector investment, the Regional Agriculture Investment Plan (RAIP 2017-2022) was revised to a new Regional Agrifood Investment Plan (RAIP 2025-2030) to place agro-industrialization and value chain development as key areas of focus.

I am also happy to report that, in fisheries and aquaculture, the implementation of the SADC Regional Aquaculture Strategy is bearing immediate results in the region, with an increase in fish production from 122,000 tons, in 2022 to 191,744 tons in 2024.

We have also witnessed some policy reforms as part of the implementation of the SADC Regional Model Policy Framework for the Leather Value Chains which seeks to turn livestock resources into opportunities for diversification and competitiveness, through increased production and trade of intermediates and leather products in the region. Six Member States have already domesticated the model policy.

To enhance the regional manufacturing of essential medical products and commodities, the region has since launched the SADC Pooled Procurement Services (SPPS) to consolidate the procurement of medicines and health commodities. This collective approach is designed as a win-win towards lower costs, improved efficiency, and access to affordable medical products and essential commodities across Member States, as well as for regional manufacturing. Regional assessments conducted by the Secretariat have

shown that the lack of regional preference in the procurement of pharmaceutical products and commodities is a big hindrance to regional manufacturing.

In mining, **Honourable Ministers**, our challenge has never been scarcity, but value addition. While our region is significantly endowed with minerals, inclusive of those considered to be of relevance to energy transition such as cobalt, copper and manganese, amongst others, regrettably, they still leave our borders in raw form. In 2019, the region developed and adopted the SADC Regional Mining Vision (RMV) and its Action Plan. The RMV therefore seeks to reposition the mining sector as a catalyst for industrialisation by strengthening linkages between mining and downstream industries, including mineral beneficiation, equipment manufacturing, and related services. As part of the implementation of the RMV, 20 potential regional projects, worth an estimated US\$2.3 billion, have been assessed as viable investment projects focusing on manufacturing of batteries, mining inputs, and mining equipment, among many others.

We are also currently finalising the revision and amendment to the SADC Protocol on Mining, which has been in force since 2000, to align it with our Regional Mining Vision, as a decisive shift towards local processing, value addition, and equitable growth. The adoption of the Critical Minerals Framework at the G20 Summit marks a turning point, as it gives us leverage to reshape global supply chains and ensure that our resources fuel prosperity at home, rather than abroad.

Honourable Ministers, trade integration is advancing. Intra-SADC trade in manufactured goods has risen modestly from 19% to 22%, reflecting progress in market integration and value chain development. This momentum is further strengthened by Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo joining the Free Trade Area, alongside 13 other Member States. Yet, much remains to be done. Chief among our priorities is the elimination of non-tariff barriers, which continue to constrain the full potential of regional trade.

The introduction of the Electronic Certificate of Origin in 2022, and the establishment of One Stop Border Posts are breaking down barriers, making it easier for small-scale traders, who account for up to 60% of cross-border commerce, to thrive. These traders are not a mere statistic; they are mothers, fathers, and young entrepreneurs whose livelihoods depend on seamless and painless trade. When they succeed, this builds into our collective success.

Energy access remains central to our regional development. While Mauritius (100%), Seychelles (99%), and South Africa (93%) have nearly achieved universal access to electricity, much of our region still lags, with weighted average access below 60% and some Member States below 30%. Behind these statistics are human stories: children studying by candlelight, businesses unable to grow, and communities left in darkness.

At present, coal accounts for 59% of electricity generation, hydropower 24%, while low-carbon sources such as solar, wind, and natural gas have risen to 12% over the past decade. The message from the recent SADC Sustainable Energy Week in Zimbabwe was clear: we must accelerate access. Harnessing solar rooftops, mini-grids, and innovative solutions is not just about infrastructure, it is about dignity, opportunity, and hope. To boost cross-border power trading, share surplus energy, and reduce deficits, the region has made progress in connecting the remaining mainland Member States, Angola, Malawi, and the United Republic of Tanzania, to the Southern Africa Power Pool (SAPP) Grid. The Malawi–Mozambique interconnector is in its final commissioning stage. The Tanzania–Zambia interconnector is scheduled for completion by 2028, and efforts to connect Angola through

Namibia are advancing, with financial structuring underway. These projects will reduce congestion, enhance electricity trade, and bring our region closer to universal access.

The Fourth Round of the SADC HIV Fund is a powerful reminder that solidarity delivers results. Over the past 15 years, Member States have mobilised US\$23 million to strengthen the HIV and AIDS response. This achievement shows that with political will and collective commitment, we can finance and manage our own priorities. This new round rightly focuses on youth, who represent the largest share of our population and remain vulnerable to HIV. By engaging them directly, we not only safeguard public health, but also unlock the full productive potential of our labour force.

Honourable Ministers, we now stand at the midpoint of implementing the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) 2020–2030, our blueprint for integration. The recent independent Mid-Term evaluation confirms that the RISDP remains strategically sound and aligned with our long-term vision. Yet, implementation has been constrained, amongst others, by financing shortfalls. To reduce this gap, the Secretariat has been mobilising resources from diverse partners. With evolving geopolitics and declining traditional support, we are diversifying and enhancing partnerships.

Still, reliance on external funding exposes our projects to external shocks, sustainability and weakens ownership. The Regional Development Fund (RDF) offers a home-grown mechanism. To date, nine Member States have signed the Agreement. Botswana and Namibia are advancing towards signature, while Angola, Zambia, and Zimbabwe have ratified. We require eight more ratifications to meet the two-thirds threshold. I, therefore, plead with Member States to expedite the signing and ratification of the Agreement, so that together we can unlock the RDF's full potential and ensure our regional programmes are driven by sustainable, home-grown financing. The world is shifting. The current geopolitical storm is a stark reminder that we must be deliberate and shift gears, be closer and more united, and be more innovative. The RDF is our vehicle for transformation. Without it, we stand still. And with it, we can boldly move forward together.

Honourable Ministers, consolidating peace and security remains a top priority. Without stability, industrialisation falters, investment declines, and Vision 2050 slips beyond reach. The region continues to engage actively in addressing the situation in both the Democratic Republic of Congo and Madagascar. Over the past five months, SADC, working alongside the East African Community, has supported the EAC-SADC Panel of Facilitators in the Eastern DRC under the merged AU-led Luanda and Nairobi Processes. In Madagascar, calm has not yet been fully restored following the protests that led to the change of leadership in October 2025. SADC deployed the Panel of Elders, led by Her Excellency Dr. Joyce Hilda Banda, Former President of Malawi, supported by the Mediation Reference Group, to facilitate dialogue and restore stability. On the margins of the 39th African Union Assembly, I also met with the AU Special Envoy on Madagascar to strengthen collaboration in support of Madagascar's path toward sustained peace.

Natural disasters continue to test our resilience and agility. Recent floods across the region, have affected over 1.3 million people in seven of our Members States, displaced more than 100,000, and claimed more than 285 lives. In response, Madagascar, Mozambique, and South Africa declared States of Disaster and appealed for international solidarity. The destruction of infrastructure is not just statistics; it is broken pathways to progress and interrupted dreams. Through the SADC Emergency Operations and Humanitarian Centre (SHOC), our regional hub for disaster preparedness, response, and recovery, we deployed

teams to reinforce national efforts, enhance coordination, and guide recovery. It is, therefore, crucial that SHOC remains adequately resourced and fully operational, so that it can continue driving coordination, supporting resilient recovery, and building collective strength against future disasters. What resonated most during the recent crises were the stories of solidarity: neighbours opening their homes, families sharing scarce resources, and Member States supporting one another in the enduring spirit of *Ubuntu*. In times of hardship, our greatest strength remains compassion, unity, and shared humanity.

On food security, acute food insecurity is projected to affect 58 million people in 2025/26 - a 16% decline from 2024/25. Yet, the spread of Foot and Mouth Disease poses a grave threat to livestock, trade, and food security. Addressing this requires decisive action: intensified surveillance, harmonised vaccination campaigns, and mobilised resources to protect farmers and economies. At the same time, bold investments in climate-smart agriculture, modern irrigation, resilient seed varieties, and strong extension services are essential to secure sustainable growth.

Beyond immediate crises, we must strengthen how we tell our regional story. Last August, Council approved the SADC Communication, Awareness and Visibility Strategy 2025–2030, whose success depends heavily on collaboration. Together, we must translate SADC policies into public education and share our region’s untold successes. To the media: bring Council outcomes to life through human-interest stories—of farmers thriving through regional trade, young entrepreneurs navigating harmonised markets, and traders benefiting from simplified regimes. Integration is ultimately about people, their dignity, opportunities, and dreams.

As we look ahead, it is equally important to honour the past. On the 23rd of this month, we will commemorate Southern Africa Liberation Day, a day set aside by SADC to honour the millions of men and women who sacrificed their lives for the freedom we enjoy today. I urge Member States to organise national activities that celebrate this milestone in our shared history and inspire future generations with the legacy of our liberation.

In conclusion, I extend my sincere gratitude to the Standing Committee of Senior Officials, under the leadership of Ambassador Tebogo Seokolo, for their thoughtful and thorough deliberations as we prepared for Council. I also wish to acknowledge my Deputy Executive Secretaries and the entire Secretariat staff, whose dedication and commitment have been instrumental in driving progress throughout the 2025–2026 financial year.

With that little account of the region’s progress, it is now my honour to invite Honourable Ronald Lamola, Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of the Republic of South Africa, and Chairperson of the SADC Council of Ministers, to deliver his opening address.

I thank you for your attention! Merci Beaucoup! Muito Obrigado! Asante sana!

Honourable Minister....