



INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

**BY MS. ANGÈLE MAKOMBO N'TUMBA
SADC DEPUTY EXECUTIVE SECRETARY- REGIONAL
INTEGRATION**

**AT THE JOINT MEETING OF SADC MINISTERS RESPONSIBLE FOR
AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SECURITY, AND FISHERIES AND
AQUACULTURE**

AT VICTORY FALLS, ZIMBABWE

29 MAY 2026

- **Honourable, Mr. John Henry Steenhuisen, Minister of Agriculture of the Republic of South Africa, and the current Chairperson of the Committee of Ministers Responsible for Agriculture and Food Security, and Fisheries and Aquaculture.**
- **Honourable Dr. Anxious Jongwe Masuka, Minister of Agriculture, Mechanisation and Water Resources Development of the Republic of Zimbabwe**
- **Honourable Ministers and Deputy Ministers here present.**
- **Heads of Delegation from the SADC Member States**
- **Mr Mooketsa Ramasodi, Director General in the Department of Agriculture of the Republic of South Africa and Chairperson of the Committee of Senior Officials responsible for Responsible for Agriculture and Food Security, and Fisheries and Aquaculture.**
- **Mr. Fahari Marwa, Director of Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources at the SADC Secretariat and all SADC Secretariat Staff.**
- **Representatives of our International Cooperating Partners**
- **Officials from the Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies of the Republic of Zimbabwe.**
- **Members of the Media.**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen.**

A very good morning.

It is a great honour and privilege to address you at the official opening of this Joint Meeting of Ministers responsible for Agriculture, Food Security, Fisheries and Aquaculture of the Southern African Development Community, SADC, here in Victoria

Falls. This iconic place, home to the spectacular “Smoke that Thunders”, one of the spectacular natural wonders of the world, reminds us of the breathtaking power and beauty that nature has bestowed upon our region. Each time we gather in Victoria Falls, we are refreshed and re-energised by its splendour - a fitting setting as we deliberate on issues aimed at advancing Food and Nutrition Security and Blue Economy.

Allow me to begin by extending my sincere gratitude to, Honourable Ministers, for taking time out of your demanding schedules to attend this important meeting in our SADC Calendar. I also extend our sincere thanks to the Government and people of the Republic of Zimbabwe, our host, for the hospitality and excellent facilities that have been put at our disposal to facilitate the convening of this meeting.

Before I proceed, it is my pleasure to formally introduce Mr Fahari Marwa, the new Director of Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources at the SADC Secretariat. Mr Marwa joined the Secretariat early this month from the East African Community, where he served as the Principal Agricultural Economist. He brings extensive expertise in agricultural policy, regional trade, and food systems transformation, experience that will be invaluable as we deepen collaboration across our region.

I am confident that under his leadership, the Directorate will provide strong technical support to Member States. I therefore request that you extend to Mr Marwa and his team, your full support as we collectively work to improve food availability, access, safety and nutritional value; disaster preparedness for food security and promote equitable and sustainable use of the environment and natural resources which are at the core of the Directorate mandate.

Honourable Ministers

This meeting comes at a time of mixed fortunes for our Member States. While some amongst us are celebrating a bumper harvest, others have experienced some challenges in their yields. Due to excessive rainfall in some parts of our region, some Member States saw their crops and livestock washed away and key infrastructure that supports agrifood systems was destroyed, making it hard for our farming communities to produce the much-needed food for their livelihood.

These challenges were compounded by the outbreak of the conflict in the Middle East which spread to over eight countries in the Gulf region. This conflict resulted in the closure and eventual restriction of movement of commodities across the Strait of Hormuz, a key chock point for movement of agricultural inputs such as nitrogen, urea, ammonia fertilizers and petroleum products which are all key inputs to agriculture.

Last week, I attended the Retreat of the SADC Ministers of Foreign Affairs held from 22-24 May 2026 in Skukuza, Kruger National Park in Mpumalanga, Republic of South Africa. During this meeting the Ministers underscored the impact of Middle East conflict and acknowledged that the conflict is driving higher food and fuel prices, exchange-rate volatility, and increasing risks to food and energy security across our Member States.

Considering these developments, Honourable Ministers, this meeting today is both timely and necessary. We recognise that agriculture is the backbone of the SADC region, sustaining over 70% of our population through direct food production, trade in inputs and products, and the vast network of downstream value chains and services that depend on it. Any disruption to this agricultural lifeline is felt across every community. We therefore look to this meeting for decisive and coordinated action as our people are counting on us to safeguard the resilience of our agrifood systems and protect their livelihoods.

Honourable Ministers,

Our region is endowed with a diverse range of field crops that are integral to our agro-industries. While we have established linkages between farmers, industry, and consumers of processed agricultural products, there remains significant scope to strengthen and promote value chains for key industrial crops such as soybeans, cotton, wheat, and rice. When aligned with the Water-Energy-Food Security Nexus and the Regional Fertilizer Programme, these efforts can substantially advance food security, raise household incomes, and improve livelihoods across our communities.

Honourable Ministers,

Livestock contributes up to 40 percent of agricultural Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and offers a key pathway out of poverty, especially for smallholder farmers through its contribution to national economies, food and nutrition security, job creation, and rural household incomes. The recent Foot and Mouth Disease has negatively impacted the livestock sector in the region. This meeting has a dedicated agenda on the Foot and Mouth Disease. This issue was also part of the agenda of the SADC Council of Ministers meeting held in March 2026 in Pretoria, South Africa which urged Member States to accelerate a coordinated regional response and strengthen cross-border surveillance, harmonised vaccination strategies, enhanced information sharing, and resource mobilisation, to safeguard livestock-based livelihoods, trade, and food security.

Honourable Ministers,

Fisheries and aquaculture play a crucial role in enhancing food and nutrition security, employment creation, and economic growth in the SADC region. The sector provides livelihoods for millions of people, particularly rural and coastal communities, while also contributing significantly to national economies and regional trade. With demand for affordable, nutritious protein rising steadily, we must act decisively to sustainably manage our fisheries resources and scale up aquaculture development. Doing so is essential to close the growing fish supply gap and safeguard the long-term resilience of our food systems. To this end, investments in aquaculture, value addition, cold chain systems, market access, and climate-resilient production systems are essential to enhancing productivity and improving livelihoods, especially for women and youth who play an important role across the fisheries value chain.

This meeting provides us with an opportunity to find ways to strengthen regional cooperation in combating illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, improving aquatic animal health systems, and promoting sustainable management of our shared water resources through fisheries and aquaculture development.

Honourable Ministers,

Climate change remains a persistent challenge for our region. In the recent years, every season bring to the fore the effects of climate change in real time, from destructive floods in some Member States to severe drought in others. While these climate-induced shocks test the resilience of our agriculture sector, they also serve a wake-up call for us to take decisive and long-term measures to minimise the impact of climate change to sustain our agriculture sector.

Predictions by climate and weather experts are indicating the likelihood of El Niño towards the end of 2026 and into early 2027, with an estimated 77% chance of a moderate-to-very-strong El Niño by October–December 2026 to January 2027. Historical analysis shows that moderate-to-strong El Niño events are usually associated with a substantially higher probability of below-average rainfall across central and southern parts of the SADC region, resulting in significant harvest failures. We must start preparing now for such for such a possibility.

Honourable Ministers,

SADC is endowed with rich plant genetic diversity capable of developing climate-resilient crops. The region is also home to some of the continent's leading agricultural scientists, based at our SADC Plant Genetic Resources Centre (SPGRC) who are equipped with requisite skills to unlock potential of our region for our benefit. This Centre has the mandate to coordinate collection, conservation and utilisation of plant genetic diversity and variability of our region. I urge Member States to deepen their

engagement with the staff of this Centre, who are present in this meeting, and fully tap into this strategic asset to protect our biodiversity and build an adaptive, food-secure SADC we all seek.

Honourable Ministers,

I am confident that this meeting will come up with concrete measures to build a food secure and resilient SADC capable of withstanding the current and future shocks. Through our deliberations, our focus on ensuring that every citizen in our region has enough to eat must remain our foremost priority. Achieving this goal demands that we scale up crop and livestock production, accelerate fisheries and aquaculture development, and harness the full potential of our blue economy. At the same time, we must conserve our biodiversity, mitigate the effects of climate change, and strengthen our preparedness to respond to natural disasters that threaten livelihoods.

In closing, I wish to express our sincere gratitude to the Senior Officials, under the able leadership of Mr Mooketsa Ramasodi, Director General in the Department of Agriculture of the Republic of South Africa, for the technical insights and recommendations that have laid a solid foundation for today's ministerial deliberations. I also extend appreciation to the SADC Secretariat staff for their tireless efforts, and to our gracious Host, the Republic of Zimbabwe, particularly the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade and the Agriculture, Mechanisation and Water Resources Development for working with the SADC Secretariat in preparing for this meeting.

I thank our International Cooperating Partner for their support. Recently SADC and the World Food Programme signed a renewed Memorandum of Understanding to tackle food insecurity and strengthen regional resilience. and look forward to continued partnership. We look forward to our continued collaboration with various partners.

I thank you and wish you fruitful deliberations.

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