



**OPENING REMARKS BY THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE SADC
STANDING COMMITTEE OF SENIOR OFFICIALS, AMBASSADOR
TEBOGO SEOKOLO, ON THE OCCASION OF THE SENIOR
OFFICIALS MEETING OF THE 46th ORDINARY SUMMIT OF SADC
HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT**

Programme Director

Your Excellency Mr Elias Magosi, Executive Secretary of SADC,

**Your Excellency Ambassador Albert Ranganai Chimbindi,
Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and
International Trade of the Republic of Zimbabwe and Outgoing
Chairperson of the Standing Committee of Senior Officials,**

**Your Excellency Ambassador Pamela Chisanga, Zambian High
Commissioner to Botswana and Incoming Chairperson of the
Standing Committee of Senior Officials,**

Distinguished Heads of Delegations and Senior Officials,

Representatives of the Government of the Republic of South Africa,

Deputy Executive Secretaries and the entire SADC Secretariat Staff,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning!

Ladies and Gentlemen, sanibonani.

Welcome to eThekweni.

We meet in this great city of Durban, in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, and this place asks something of us before we begin.

Behind this city stands the Drakensberg, majestic and ancient, watching the uMngeni River cut the Valley of a Thousand Hills into the plains that refuses the single glance and withholds its full meaning until you have gone slowly through its gorges and villages.

This coast has received the Indian Ocean for longer than any of us can properly calculate, its warm water carrying sardines, traders and conquerors and dreamers, until a city grew here that carries all of those inheritances and contradictions simultaneously, sometimes uneasily.

A few kilometres from this venue, Dr John Langalibalele Dube, whose very name announces that the sun is shining, built Ohlange Institute, put a newspaper in people's hands, and understood before most of his generation that the liberation of a continent would have to be an intellectual undertaking before it could become a political one.

This is the ground of kings who extended a nation's reach without a fixed frontier, of Queen Nandi whose endurance shaped a century, of Cetshwayo who met a colonial army at Isandlwana and showed the world that Africa would not be taken without a fight.

It is also the ground of Pixley ka Isaka Seme, growing up in Inanda within sight of these same hills, who stood before the world in 1906 and declared the regeneration of Africa, pan-African vision helped call the anti colonial movement into being and who spent his life insisting that Africans possessed the interior resources required to govern themselves with dignity.

It was here in this building, that Africa chose to honour that dream of Seme in the most concrete way available to it, when the Organisation of African Unity was dissolved and the African Union was constituted in July 2002, transforming a body born of the anti-colonial struggle into an institution oriented toward the shared development and political integration of a free continent.

We gather in the shadow of that moment, in the same city where Seme's dream was given its most durable institutional expression, and it is therefore entirely appropriate that we come here once more to take stock of what that integration requires of us in our own region as SADC...

Ladies and gentlemen

It is both a profound honour and a great privilege to stand before you today as I accept, on behalf of the Republic of South Africa, the Chairpersonship of the SADC Standing Committee of Senior Officials for the period from August 2026 to August 2027.

Allow me, at the outset, to express our sincere gratitude to all Member States for the confidence you have placed in South Africa to lead this important institution of our organisation. We accept this responsibility with humility, a deep sense of duty, and an unwavering commitment to the principles and aspirations that unite us as the Southern African Development Community.

Today's ceremony is particularly significant in the history of our organisation. Although South Africa has had the honour of serving as Interim Chair of SADC following the unforeseen circumstances that affected our sister Republic of Madagascar, today marks our formal assumption of the substantive Chairship. This transition is not merely ceremonial; rather, it reaffirms the resilience of our regional institutions and our collective commitment to ensuring continuity in the work of SADC, irrespective of the challenges we may encounter.

In this regard, I wish to acknowledge, with deep appreciation, the Republic of Zimbabwe for its remarkable sense of camaraderie, solidarity, and selfless leadership in willingly putting its shoulder to the wheel as we collectively sought to keep the leadership wagon of our organisation moving during an unprecedented period. Zimbabwe's readiness to host several statutory meetings and ensure the continuity of SADC's work demonstrated an unwavering commitment to our shared values and to the principle that the strength of our organisation lies in our collective responsibility.

I also wish to pay tribute to the Republic of Zambia, the Incoming Chair, for the distinguished leadership it has provided during the past year as part of the Summit Troika. The progress achieved during this transition has laid a firm foundation upon which we shall continue to build. South Africa looks forward to working closely with Zimbabwe, Zambia and every Member State in advancing our shared regional agenda. As the famous African proverb goes, "Wisdom is like a baobab tree; no one individual can embrace it."

Distinguished Delegates,

As the Standing Committee of Senior Officials, we must recognise that our responsibility extends well beyond debating issues in our meetings. We are entrusted with ensuring that the Council of Ministers receives strategic, well-considered and implementable recommendations. We serve as the bridge between policy formulation and implementation. The quality of our work will therefore determine not only the effectiveness of the Council's deliberations, but ultimately the pace at which our regional commitments are translated into tangible improvements in the lives of our people in Umlazi (South Africa), Salima (Malawi), Masvingo (Zimbabwe), Kitwe (Zambia), Opuwo (Namibia) or Kasai (DRC). It is therefore appropriate that we approach our work over the coming days with a shared sense of purpose and responsibility.

The agenda before us is both extensive and consequential. It reflects the breadth of the regional integration programme and the growing expectations placed upon our Community to respond effectively to an

increasingly complex regional and global environment, which is characterised by geopolitical uncertainty, economic volatility, climate-related shocks, public health challenges, and evolving peace and security threats.

Among the issues before us are matters relating to the financial status of our organisation, which remains under considerable pressure owing to the difficult fiscal circumstances facing many Member States and the continued decline in donor support from our international partners. Peace and security remain among our greatest preoccupations, particularly in light of the continuing destabilisation of social and economic livelihoods in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Let me take this opportunity to express my deepest condolences and those of the Government of South Africa on the tragic loss of life caused by the Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and to reaffirm our solidarity with the people and Government of the DRC during this difficult period.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our aspiration for a region that produces what it consumes and trades more extensively within itself remains alive. Therefore, industrialisation remains the cornerstone of our regional efforts to drive economic transformation, create decent employment, and advance shared prosperity. These efforts must be complemented by sustained investment in infrastructure development, trade and market integration, food and nutrition security, energy security, climate resilience, social and human development, public health, gender equality, youth empowerment and institutional strengthening – all of which remain at the centre of our regional integration agenda.

Over the coming few days, our meeting will also consider important reports on the implementation of previous Summit and Council decisions, progress in strengthening monitoring, evaluation and reporting systems, resource mobilisation, the sustainable financing of the Community, and measures aimed at improving the effectiveness and efficiency of SADC institutions.

Equally significant will be our consideration of institutional reform initiatives designed to strengthen implementation, improve coordination among Member States and the Secretariat, and ensure that the decisions adopted by our institutions produce measurable developmental outcomes across our region. In this regard, we have all dedicated considerable time to refining the Mechanism for rationalising the number and quality of our decisions, and for this we should all be proud of ourselves.

Distinguished Delegates,

Four over decades, SADC remained a symbol of solidarity, collective self-reliance and regional cooperation. Today, our responsibility is to preserve that legacy while preparing our organisation for the opportunities of tomorrow for a farmer in Manzini (Eswatini), a goldsmith in Daraina (Madagascar), a truck driver in Morogoro (Tanzania), a fisherman in Walvis Bay (Namibia) and a boutique owner in Port Louis (Mauritius). This requires us to strengthen the implementation of our regional programmes, deepen cooperation among our Member States, enhance institutional effectiveness and continue building a peaceful, prosperous, resilient and integrated Southern African region.

This vision must be underpinned by resilient institutions, an ethical organisational culture that promotes transparency and accountability, a professional and committed workforce, and, above all, an Executive Management that unites staff around a common vision and remains fully invested in the affairs, performance and reputation of the organisation.

During the coming twelve months, as South Africa leads our organisation, and with your continued support, we will strive to discharge our responsibilities with humility, a spirit of service, and a sense of urgency. Therefore, I pledge to work closely with every Member State, the Secretariat and all SADC institutions in a spirit of openness, inclusivity and mutual respect. Together, we must continue to strengthen the foundations of our organisation and advance the aspirations embodied in the SADC Treaty, Vision 2050 and the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan.

As we commence our work today in preparing recommendations for our Ministers, I encourage all delegations to engage openly, constructively, and in the spirit of consensus that has always distinguished our Organisation. Let us approach every agenda item not simply as representatives advancing the narrow interests of our respective Member States, but as custodians of the collective spirit and shared future of our region.

I wish us all productive and successful deliberations.

I thank you.