



**WELCOME ADDRESS BY PRESIDENT CYRIL RAMAPHOSA TO
THE 46TH ORDINARY SUMMIT OF SADC HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT**

**17 AUGUST 2026
ETHEKWINI, SOUTH AFRICA**

Programme Director,
Your Majesties,
Your Excellencies, Heads of State and Government,
Chairperson of the African Union Commission, His Excellency Mahmoud Ali Youssouf,
Executive Secretary of SADC, Mr Elias Magosi,
Honourable Ministers,
Ambassadors and High Commissioners,
Heads of Delegation,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Sanibonani. Good morning.

On behalf of the Government and the people of South Africa, I extend a warm welcome to you all.

We welcome you to our country, to the province of KwaZulu-Natal and to the beautiful city of eThekweni.

You have come not as strangers or visitors, but as brothers and sisters, as partners and as fellow custodians of a shared Southern African destiny.

We hope that during your time here, you will experience the warmth, friendship and hospitality of the people of South Africa.

Your Majesties,
Your Excellencies,

We meet in a city that occupies a special place in the history of African unity.

It was here in Durban, 24 years ago, that the African Union was officially launched.

That historic gathering marked Africa's determination to move from the struggle against colonialism and apartheid towards a new era of continental cooperation, integration and development.

Today, we meet exactly 34 years after the SADC Declaration and Treaty was signed in Windhoek, Namibia, on the 17th of August 1992.

We therefore meet at the confluence of two defining moments in Africa's history: the establishment of our Southern African Community and the birth of our continental Union.

These anniversaries are more than dates on a calendar.

They remind us of the vision, courage and determination of those who came before us.

They also challenge us to ask whether we are moving with sufficient speed and purpose to realise the Africa they envisaged.

The African Union was born out of the conviction that Africa's future would be secured through cooperation, integration and unity.

That vision is embodied in Agenda 2063 and in its aspiration for an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens.

As SADC, we have embraced that vision.

We gather at this Summit to give practical meaning to its promise: to transform borders into bridges, national economies into a shared market, and geographical proximity into shared prosperity.

At the outset, I wish to express our appreciation to my brother, His Excellency President Emmerson Mnangagwa, President of the Republic of Zimbabwe and outgoing Chairperson of SADC.

We thank you, Mr President, for your leadership and stewardship of our Community.

We particularly appreciate the spirit of partnership with which Zimbabwe worked with South Africa during the period of interim leadership.

Zimbabwe's support in co-hosting Sectoral Ministerial Meetings helped to ensure continuity in the work of our Community.

We likewise acknowledge Zambia, the members of the Troika, the SADC Secretariat and all Member States for the cooperation and collective leadership they have demonstrated.

The story of SADC is a story of the triumph of solidarity over division and adversity.

Before we became a development community, we were a community of solidarity.

The peoples of this region stood together against colonialism, minority rule and apartheid.

The countries of Southern Africa endured aggression, destabilisation and immense economic hardship because they understood that no country in this region could be truly free while another remained oppressed.

Together, the people of our region overcame colonial rule and apartheid.

Together, we transformed Southern Africa from a region marked by conflict and oppression into a community founded on peace, democracy, cooperation and a common future.

Today, our task is to give economic and social meaning to that political liberation.

We are a Community of 16 nations and more than 400 million people.

We possess abundant mineral resources, vast agricultural potential, a youthful population and growing industrial and technological capabilities.

We have made important progress.

The SADC Free Trade Area has created a platform for greater regional commerce.

The SADC Real-Time Gross Settlement System facilitates cross-border payments and draws our economies closer together.

Through the Southern African Power Pool, Member States share electricity infrastructure and resources across national borders.

Through regional cooperation, we are strengthening our collective capacity to prevent conflict, support democratic governance and respond to political and security challenges.

Through the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention and the World Health Organization, we are strengthening disease surveillance, pandemic preparedness and health security across our region.

The importance of this cooperation is demonstrated by the devastating Ebola outbreak caused by the Bundibugyo virus in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

At the latest count, nearly 5,000 confirmed cases have been recorded and more than 2,300 lives have been lost.

Behind every number is a human life.

Behind every statistic is a grieving family, an anxious community and a health worker placing their own life at risk to save others.

On behalf of the Government and people of South Africa, and on behalf of our Community, we express our deepest condolences to the Government and people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

We commend the courage of Congolese health workers and communities.

We appreciate the leadership of the Government of the DRC, Africa CDC and the World Health Organization, working with regional and international partners to coordinate the response.

But the outbreak continues to outpace our efforts.

We must do more, and we must act with urgency.

We call for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in the affected conflict areas and for safe and secure humanitarian access so that health workers can reach every affected community.

We call on all parties to respect health facilities, health workers and humanitarian operations.

We call on governments to avoid indiscriminate restrictions on travel and trade against affected countries.

Such restrictions are not supported by public-health evidence. They damage economies, disrupt livelihoods and may drive movement through unmonitored border crossings, thereby making containment more difficult.

As SADC, we stand in solidarity with the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

We must strengthen surveillance, laboratory capacity, emergency coordination and clinical preparedness in neighbouring Member States and across the region.

We must also ensure that financial pledges are translated urgently into resources on the ground.

Protecting Africa from epidemics requires more than responding when outbreaks occur.

It requires sustained investment in prevention, surveillance, resilient health systems, research and the African production of vaccines, diagnostics and medicines.

This is an important test of our solidarity and of Africa's determination to build greater health sovereignty.

Your Majesties,
Your Excellencies,

The work undertaken across all these areas demonstrates that SADC is not simply a forum for meetings, summits and communiqués.

SADC is an instrument through which we give practical effect to our vision of a peaceful, integrated, industrialised and prosperous Southern Africa.

The report of the Executive Secretary, Mr Elias Magosi, details the progress that has been made.

It also challenges us to do much more, with greater urgency, focus and discipline.

We thank the Executive Secretary, the Secretariat, our Senior Officials and our Ministers for the sterling work they have undertaken in preparing for this Summit.

While our regional integration agenda is making progress, the pace of transformation remains too slow.

Our region recorded economic growth of approximately 3.4 per cent in 2025.

Yet intra-SADC trade accounted for only around one-fifth of the region's total trade.

After decades of integration, we have not yet unlocked the full potential of our regional market.

We continue to import too many goods that we could produce within our region.

We continue to export raw materials that we could process and beneficiate ourselves.

We continue to procure services from elsewhere that our own people and businesses have the skills and capacity to provide.

Every raw mineral exported without beneficiation represents value that has left our shores.

Every product imported that could competitively be manufactured here represents jobs that could have been created in our communities.

We have everything we need across the 16 Member States of our Community to meet the needs of our people.

We have the natural resources.

We have the land and agricultural potential.

We have the skills and capabilities.

Above all, we have more than 400 million people whose energy, ingenuity and enterprise must become the driving force of our development.

The people of our region are asking us to deliver the dividend of economic liberation.

They want decent jobs, growing industries, reliable electricity, affordable food, quality healthcare, education and opportunities for young people.

They expect regional integration to improve their daily lives in visible, practical and meaningful ways.

This Summit must therefore accelerate implementation of the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan 2020–2030.

First, we must deepen industrialisation and build regional value chains.

The minerals and agricultural commodities of our region must become the foundation of Southern African manufacturing.

We must process more of what we mine, add value to more of what we grow and manufacture more of what we consume.

Second, we must invest boldly in regional infrastructure.

We need roads that link our countries, efficient railways that carry minerals and manufactured goods, and modern ports that connect Southern Africa to continental and global markets.

Our infrastructure must connect not only capitals and commercial centres, but also rural communities, border towns and underserved regions that have remained on the margins of development.

Third, we must strengthen our energy, water and digital security.

We must expand electricity generation and transmission capacity and deepen cooperation through the Southern African Power Pool.

Every citizen must have access to safe water and adequate sanitation.

We must therefore invest in cross-border water infrastructure to secure water for our households, farms and industries.

We must expand affordable digital connectivity so that every community, entrepreneur and young person can participate fully in the digital economy.

Fourth, we must build climate-resilient food systems.

Our region has the land, climate diversity and agricultural expertise to feed itself and become a major global producer of food.

We must improve agricultural productivity, strengthen regional food reserves and agricultural value chains, and support smallholder and emerging farmers.

Fifth, we must make full use of the opportunities presented by the African Continental Free Trade Area.

SADC must become a powerful platform from which our businesses can access a continental market of more than 1.4 billion people.

But this will require us to remove non-tariff barriers, improve border management, harmonise standards and make it easier for goods, services, capital and skills to move across our region.

Our decisions must be implemented.

They must be properly costed, funded, assigned and monitored.

Our communiqués must become construction sites, factories, power lines, water systems, laboratories, businesses and jobs.

Regional integration must be seen and felt in the daily lives of our people.

None of this will be possible without peace, security and democratic stability.

Peace without development is fragile.

Development without peace is impossible.

We must continue to invest in preventive diplomacy, mediation and political dialogue.

We must strengthen the work of the SADC Panel of Elders, the Organ Troika and our regional institutions.

We must resolve differences through dialogue, uphold our shared democratic principles and act collectively wherever the peace and stability of our region are threatened.

Our Community is like a great river system.

Each Member State is a tributary, with its own history, identity, character and strength.

When those separate currents come together, they become a powerful force that carries opportunity across borders and sustains all in its path.

A tributary does not lose its identity when it joins a great river. It gains reach, depth and power.

In the same way, regional integration does not diminish our sovereignty.

It multiplies our collective capacity to secure the well-being of our people.

Our Community must therefore become more than the sum of its Member States.

It must have the institutional strength, authority and resources to advance our common interests and realise our shared vision.

Let this Summit be remembered not merely for the declarations we adopt, but for the decisions we implement.

Let eThekweni, the city in which the African Union was launched, become the place where SADC renewed its determination to build a truly integrated regional economy.

Let us turn our borders into bridges.

Let us turn our resources into industries.

Let us turn our youthful population into a powerful demographic dividend.

Let us turn our solidarity into shared prosperity.

Let this Summit inspire a new era of regional integration that delivers dignity, opportunity and hope to every citizen of Southern Africa.

Let it reaffirm our commitment to peace, security and democracy.

Let it strengthen our resolve to build diversified, industrialised and resilient economies.

And let it move us closer to the Southern Africa envisioned in SADC Vision 2050: a peaceful, inclusive, competitive and prosperous region in which no country and no person is left behind.

It is now my honour to declare the 46th Ordinary Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Southern African Development Community officially open.

I thank you.