MINISTRY
COOPERATIVE GOVERNANCE AND TRADITIONAL AFFAIRS
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

OPENING REMARKS BY

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RESPONSIBLE FOR DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT

SEVENTH ORDINARY MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS

RESPONSIBLE FOR DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT

VIRTUAL MEETING | 12 NOVEMBER 2026

Your Excellencies and Honourable Ministers,

Chairperson of the Senior Officials Meeting,

The Acting Deputy Executive Secretary of SADC,

Senior Officials,

Representatives of the SADC Secretariat,

International Cooperating Partners,

Distinguished Delegates,

Good morning. Bom dia. Bonjour. Habari za asubuhi.

It is my honour to welcome you to the Seventh Ordinary Meeting of the SADC Committee of Ministers Responsible for Disaster Risk Management. I thank the Senior Officials and the SADC Secretariat for the work undertaken in preparing the matters now before us.

We meet at a consequential moment for our region. The 2025/26 rainfall season supported a broad recovery in agricultural production, pasture, water availability and regional food supply. Yet that recovery was uneven. Floods, tropical cyclones, localised dry spells, disease outbreaks and other shocks continued to cause loss of life, displacement, infrastructure damage and livelihood disruption.

The message is clear: an improved regional outlook does not mean that vulnerability has been overcome. It means that we have a narrow opportunity to protect recent gains before the next shock reverses them.

The outlook for the 2026/27 season requires urgency, discipline and differentiated action. Strong to very strong El Niño conditions, elevated temperatures and below-normal rainfall are expected across much of central and southern SADC, while northern, coastal and island areas may remain exposed to flooding and other high-rainfall hazards. Our region must therefore prepare for drought, heat stress, water shortages, floods, severe storms, wildfires, disease outbreaks and cascading impacts on agriculture, energy, health, infrastructure and regional markets.

Preparedness cannot be uniform when risk is not uniform. Regional assessments must be translated into downscaled national and subnational forecasts, practical advisories and early decisions that reach institutions, farmers and communities in time to act.

Our agenda appropriately connects weather and climate information with food and nutrition security, disaster preparedness, humanitarian logistics, anticipatory action and the full operationalisation of the SADC Humanitarian and Emergency Operations Centre. These are not separate workstreams. They form one regional system for protecting lives, livelihoods and development gains.

The 2026 Regional Synthesis Report reminds us that improved food availability does not automatically guarantee food security. Approximately 53 million people in the reporting Member States are projected to be food insecure during the 2026/27 consumption period. Food insecurity is shaped not only by production, but also by poverty, conflict, displacement, food prices, market access, household income and the affordability of a nutritious diet.

Our response must therefore combine resilient agriculture and functioning regional trade with nutrition interventions, livelihood protection and shock-responsive social protection. We must protect the most vulnerable before coping mechanisms are exhausted and before forecast hazards become humanitarian emergencies.

Honourable Ministers, the state of preparedness for the coming season demands equally serious attention. The regional snapshot indicates that around 41 million people may be at risk. Based on the costed plans available, preparedness and response requirements are estimated at approximately 1.85 billion United States dollars, against about 241 million dollars currently available. This severe financing gap requires us to move beyond expressions of

concern and towards costed plans, assigned responsibilities, pre-arranged financing and measurable implementation.

Contingency plans that are not approved, financed, tested and understood by those responsible for implementation cannot protect communities. Member States must finalise and validate El Niño-informed contingency plans, identify triggers and early actions, secure resources, pre-position essential supplies and strengthen coordination across sectors and across borders.

The first SADC Regional Cyclone and Flood Response Simulation Exercise demonstrated the value of testing our systems before disaster strikes. Simulation exercises must become a regular instrument for identifying weaknesses in decision-making, early warning, authorisation, deployment and coordination, and for correcting those weaknesses before lives depend on the system.

The Regional Prepositioning Strategy can similarly strengthen our readiness by improving the location, availability and movement of humanitarian relief supplies. When disaster strikes, avoidable administrative or logistical delays must not prevent assistance from reaching affected communities. We need clear procedures, interoperable systems, reliable information on available stocks and efficient arrangements for cross-border support.

Regional anticipatory action is central to this shift. Early warning is valuable only when it leads to early decisions, early financing and early action. The SADC Multi-Hazard Regional Anticipatory Action Framework 2026–2030 gives us a common basis for linking forecasts and agreed triggers to pre-arranged interventions. Its value will be determined by implementation at national and regional levels.

The window for anticipatory action is already narrowing. Measures that protect planting, water access, livestock, household income and essential services must be activated before impacts are fully visible. Action taken only after crop failure, displacement or loss of livelihoods is no longer anticipation. It is response.

The SADC Humanitarian and Emergency Operations Centre must become an operational anchor of this regional system. SHOC should be capable of maintaining situational awareness, supporting early warning, coordinating regional preparedness, enabling rapid mobilisation and facilitating assistance to Member States affected by disasters.

This requires clear authority, capable leadership, adequate staffing, reliable operating procedures and sustainable financing. We must therefore ensure that the recruitment of the Executive Director is concluded in accordance with the approved roadmap, that State Parties fulfil their assessed contribution obligations, and that Member States which are not yet party to SHOC are encouraged to accede. A regional institution cannot be fully operational if its mandate is not matched by institutional and financial commitment.

Our deliberations today must be measured by the decisions we take and the implementation that follows. We should leave this meeting with a clear regional position on seasonal climate risk, decisions on the Regional Synthesis Report, humanitarian prepositioning and anticipatory action, and practical direction on contingency planning, financing, logistics and the operationalisation of SHOC.

I encourage all delegations to engage with candour and a shared sense of responsibility. Disaster risk does not respect national borders, and no Member State should be left to confront a major disaster alone. Regional solidarity must be organised in advance, adequately resourced and capable of being activated when it is most needed.

As Ministers, our responsibility is to ensure that regional knowledge becomes national action, that national preparedness supports regional resilience, and that our institutions deliver measurable protection to the people of Southern Africa.

With these remarks, I declare the Seventh Ordinary Meeting of the SADC Committee of Ministers Responsible for Disaster Risk Management officially open. I wish us focused and productive deliberations.

I thank you.