



REMARKS BY

**HER EXCELLENCY DR. STERGOMENA LAWRENCE TAX
SADC EXECUTIVE SECRETARY**

DURING THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE

MEETING OF THE SADC COUNCIL OF MINISTERS

13 AUGUST 2021

Honourable Verónica Nataniel Macamo Dlhovo, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of the Republic of Mozambique, and Chairperson of the SADC Council of Ministers;

Honourable Eisenhower Nduwa Mkaka, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Malawi, and the Incoming Chairperson of the SADC Council of Ministers;

Honourable Ministers;

SADC Deputy Executive Secretaries;

Senior Officials from the SADC Member States;

Your Excellencies Heads of International and Regional Organisations;

Your Excellencies, Ambassadors, High Commissioners and Members of the Diplomatic Corps;

SADC Secretariat staff;

Our partners from the media;

Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am honoured to welcome you all to this SADC Council of Ministers' meeting.

When the COVID-19 pandemic started one and half years ago, we thought it would be a brief phenomenon, unfortunately, it is still here with us, with increasing social and economic impacts across the globe, and across sectors. This notwithstanding, the region has put in place measures to ensure business continuity and address or mitigate COVID-19 socio-economic impacts. We thank our leaders for being pragmatic.

May I also thank the Government and people of the Republic of Malawi, for accepting to host the 41st SADC Summit, and to take over the Chairpersonship of SADC for 2021/22. May I also express our gratitude to the Republic of Mozambique for steering SADC integration agenda during 2020/21.

As per SADC tradition, during this meeting, the Republic of Mozambique as the outgoing Chairperson of Council will be handing over the Chairpersonship to the Republic of Malawi. Allow me to express our sincere gratitude to Honourable Veronica Dlhovo, for her stewardship and outstanding leadership during her tenure. Muito Obrigada. May I also recognize the excellent support rendered by Chairperson of the Senior Officials, Ambassador Carlos Costa.

The COVID-19 pandemic has unfortunately robbed the region of visionary leaders, statesmen and women, high ranking officials, SADC Secretariat Staff, spouses and relatives, and a number of SADC citizens. Allow me to pay special tribute to leaders that the region has lost, and express condolences to all who lost their loved ones. May the souls of the departed rest in eternal peace.

Honourable Ministers,

Despite the very challenging environment, the region registered significant progress, during the Chairpersonship of the Republic of Mozambique, under the 40th SADC theme of *40 years Building Peace and Security, Promoting Development and Resilience in face of global challenges*”.

In the area of peace and security cooperation, the region remained stable and peaceful, while consolidating democratic principles, as evidenced by peaceful elections, which took place in the Republic of Seychelles and the United Republic of Tanzania. We have, however, witnessed pockets of terrorism and acts of violent extremism in some areas, including in the Eastern DRC and Northern Mozambique, which the region continues to address proportionately. The re-configuration of the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) operating under the United Nations Organization Mission in Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) was finalized and deployed; also a SADC Standby force was deployed to support the Republic of Mozambique to combat terrorism. May I thank SADC Member States for their solidarity and the accorded support.

On the economic front, at global level, the COVID-19 pandemic triggered the deepest global recession since World War II, due to economic lockdowns, which disrupted global supply chains, weakened demand for goods and services, and weakened tourism and other businesses. With regard to macro-economic convergence, a number of Member States were unable to meet the agreed macro-economic convergence criteria. Data indicates that SADC Regional GDP Growth contracted by 4.8% in 2020, which is lower than the growth of 2.1% recorded in 2019. Regional inflation rates increased to an average of 49.6% in 2020 from 16.4% in 2019. Public debt also increased from 55.5% of GDP in 2019 to 63.2% of GDP in 2020. Member States are therefore, encouraged to continue with fiscal and monetary policy measures until economic recovery is back on an upward trajectory.

On industrialization, a number of milestones were recorded, including the development of four (4) Value Chains in the Agriculture sector, and eight (8) Aquaculture-specific Value Chains, and implementation is ongoing. A Regional Framework for Supplier Development with a special focus on building capacities

and capabilities of Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs) to contribute to industrialisation was also finalized, and is being used by Member States.

To ascertain the status of industrialization, a Regional Gap Analysis was undertaken during the year, based on which, a regional programme on improving competitiveness of SADC Member States was developed. The competitiveness programme is aimed at ensuring that all SADC Member States strive at achieving SADC industrialization goals.

Infrastructure development remains very critical in regional integration. During the year, among others, the construction of Kazungula Bridge and the establishment of Kazungula One Border Post project were concluded and launched in May 2021. The bridge connects Botswana and Zambia and links other SADC Countries including DRC, Namibia, Zimbabwe, and Tanzania. The bridge is expected to enhance access to international markets. The bridge and the One Stop Border posts, will also improve border management by reducing significantly freight and passenger transit time, and in doing so, reduce transaction costs across sectors. With these benefits of cross-border infrastructure projects, it is my sincere hope that Member States will fast-track the implementation of the SADC Regional Infrastructure Development Master Plan, specifically, priority projects identified in the SADC transport and trade corridors.

In the energy sector, the SADC Secretariat continued to support Member States to strengthen regional infrastructure connectivity through project preparation, including for Mulembo Lelya Hydro Electric Power (DRC and Zambia); and Angola-Namibia Transmission Interconnector (Angola and Namibia). A draft Agreement amending the Protocol on Energy of 1996 was finalized, and will be presented for your consideration. The Protocol will enable the region to enhance co-operation among Member States in the development of energy infrastructure projects that encourage regional integration and support intra-trading through efficient and sustainable energy resources in the Region. The Protocol will also promote regulatory institutional frameworks to ensure participation of the private sector, women and youth in the provision of affordable energy services, and universal energy access in the Region.

SADC Secretariat also continued to coordinate and manage the COMESA-EAC-SADC Tripartite Transport and Transit Facilitation Programme (TTTFP), which aims to provide a harmonised legal, and regulatory system and framework for Member States to implement harmonized minimum standards in cross border road transportation.

In the telecommunications and information technology sector, interventions made played a critical role in strengthening Cyber Security, and adapting and remaining resilient during the COVID-19 pandemic. Such interventions include domestication of the SADC Harmonised Cybersecurity Model Laws.

Strides were also recorded in the implementation of the Regional Agricultural Policy, to ensure production of good quality seeds, strengthen management of Transboundary Crop and Animal Diseases and Pests, improved market access to agricultural products, and improved Natural Resources Management. These include the development of the new Forestry Strategy 2020-2030, and the operationalization of the SADC Trans-Frontier Conservation Areas Financing Facility that will contribute to the implementation of the SADC Trans – Frontier Conservation Areas (TFCA) Program.

On **Human Development**, the development of SADC Employment and Labour Policy Framework, and the SADC Youth Empowerment Policy Framework were finalized. On one hand, the Employment and Labour Policy Framework is expected to guide Member States on key priorities in addressing decent work deficits, including unemployment and underemployment, which continue to undermine prospects for productive structural transformation and poverty eradication in the region. The framework identifies five strategic objectives to be implemented in a mutually reinforcing manner in the thematic areas of employment creation; rights at work; social security; social dialogue; and labour migration. I am confident that Member States will find the Framework useful.

On the other hand, the SADC Youth Empowerment Policy Framework aims at addressing challenges affecting youth in the region, and further highlights gaps in youth development and empowerment, most notably on account of poor sexual and reproductive health of young people, limited access to secondary education and beyond, high rates of unemployment and underemployment, as well as the predominance of low-productivity entrepreneurship in the informal economy. The Policy Framework recognises that these challenges have been worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has disproportionately affected those who are already disadvantaged. Once approved and implemented, the Policy Framework will enhance prospects of harnessing the demographic dividend in the SADC region.

Honourable Ministers,

COVID -19 continues to ravage and overwhelm the already weak health systems. The third wave has been ruthless with devastating effects, including, high case loads, and high death rates. While SADC Member states have embarked on the roll out of the COVID-19 vaccines, vaccine roll out remains quite low to confer herd immunity. This is attributed to the limited access to vaccines, insufficient vaccine infrastructure, inadequate preparation for vaccine rollout, and vaccine hesitancy. Member States continue with concerted efforts to address these bottlenecks. May I also commend Member States for the measures taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19, and to address and/or mitigate its negative effects. We are not yet out of the Pandemic, and we need to continue working together. One of the concrete measures that will ensure sustainable availability of vaccines, health products and commodities, and as such strengthen regional health security, is local manufacturing. In this regard, Member States are encouraged to enhance their capacities in these areas, and to continue pushing for a temporary waiver of the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement for the manufacture of vaccines.

I wish to acknowledge and commend the announcement by the World Health Organisation (WHO) on the selection of the Republic of South Africa as the host of the first COVID vaccine technology transfer hub. This hub will be instrumental in scaling up production and access to COVID-19 vaccines. This is a good starting point towards the effort to build vaccine development and manufacturing capacity that will position the region on the right path. Other Member States wishing to embark on local manufacturing will benefit from the experiences of the Republic of South Africa.

Honourable Ministers,

As I conclude, this being my last Council of Ministers' Meeting in my capacity as the Executive Secretary of SADC, allow me to deeply thank you Honourable Ministers, for your invaluable support that enabled me and my Team to discharge our duties. It was rewarding, and at times challenging, as the aspirations and expectations of this region were sometimes complex and overwhelming. My Team and I, collectively tried to the best of our abilities to serve the region. I learned a lot during the process, and will apply the lessons learnt in my future endeavours.

As a human being, I might have erred, and constrained/hurt some people, if that happened, it could not have been intentional, and I beg for your understanding and forgiveness. Where I differed with anyone, I took it, as a healthy professional difference of opinions, and I do not hold any grudge. Our father, the late Nelson

Mandela said before he left the prison **“How many of us have imprisoned ourselves inside the walls of anger and bitterness? Holding grudges does not make you strong, it makes you bitter; forgiveness does not make you weak, it sets you free”**. As I exit, I will forever cherish the good memories of working with you, and being part of SADC development and integration agenda.

I thank you Honourable Ministers, Senior Officials, SADC Partners, and SADC citizens for believing in me, and for the tremendous support provided to me and my Team. In a special way allow me to extend my gratitude to the SADC Deputy Executive Secretary for Regional Integration, Dr. Theminkosi Mhlongo a colleague that we assumed the role of being Executives almost at the same time at the Secretariat, and worked very well together. He willingly allowed me to tap into his long institutional memory at the Secretariat; and to the SADC Deputy Executive Secretary for Corporate Affairs, Amb. Joseph Nourrice who helped in ensuring that the Secretariat observes good governance principles at all times; and to the entire team at the SADC Secretariat, that continues to serve the region diligently even during tough times. I am confident that I am leaving this healthy organisation in good hands, under my successor. May we accord him the same support that I enjoyed, and may I wish him success.

May I also welcome Honourable Eisenhower Nduwa Mkaka, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Malawi, and Incoming Chairperson of the SADC Council of Ministers, and assure him of SADC’s support.

I thank you for your attention!

Merci beaucoup!

Muito obrigada!

Asanteni sana!

Zikomo kwambiri