



STATEMENT

BY

CHAIRPERSON

HONOURABLE SINDISIWE CHIKUNGA

**MINISTRY OF WOMEN, YOUTH AND PERSONS WITH
DISABILITIES
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE
ORDINARY MEETING OF SADC MINISTERS RESPONSIBLE
FOR GENDER/ WOMEN'S AFFAIRS**

26 JUNE 2026

- **Honourable Ministers and Assistant Ministers from SADC Member States;**
- **Your Excellency, Mr Elia M. Magosi, SADC Executive Secretary**
- **Ms Dineo Mmako, Acting Director General of the South African Ministry of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities and Chairperson of the Senior Officials for the Gender Sector.**
- **Representatives from the United Nations Agencies and other Development Partners.**
- **Members of the Diplomatic Corps.**
- **Representatives of Civil Society Organisations.**
- **Members of the Media.**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen, Good Morning!**

It is an honour to welcome you all to this important meeting of the **Southern African Development Community (SADC) Ministers of Gender and Women's Affairs.**

1. As we convene today, it is critical for the SADC region to reflect on our achievements as a region, as well as on the challenges that continue to hinder regional progress. You will recall that our journey toward gender equality dates to the 1990s, when **SADC Heads of State and Government** signed the **SADC Declaration on Gender and Development in September 1997**, followed by its **Addendum on the Prevention and Eradication of Violence Against Women and Children in September 1998**. These instruments were not an end in themselves — but rather **a foundation for advancing the SADC Gender Agenda**, as evidenced by the **Protocol on**

Gender and Development, adopted in **August 2008** and revised in **2016**.

Honourable Ministers,

2. Our guiding framework — the **SADC Protocol on Gender and Development** — provides comprehensive obligations for Member States: to eliminate discrimination, to prevent and respond to gender-based violence, and to ensure equal access to justice.

3. I trust that, as **Ministers responsible for Gender and Women's Affairs**, we shall actively interrogate our progress in the implementation of all our gender instruments and commitments — identify the key challenges — and develop the strategic interventions required to ensure the achievement of the **Sustainable Development Goals**, particularly **Goal 5 on the Promotion of Gender Equality and the Empowerment of All Women and Girls**.

4. Honourable Ministers, you will recall that in **2025**, in **Harare, Zimbabwe**, we noted the progress made in our region, and we approved the **Revised Strategy on Gender-Based Violence** and the **Framework for Achieving Gender Parity in Political and Decision-Making Positions**. I therefore urge you, colleagues, to **mobilise resources to ensure the implementation of these frameworks**. I believe you will agree

with me that, as a region, **we are not faring well in those two areas.**

Honourable Ministers and Distinguished Delegates,

5. We note with concern that the **2030 Agenda** has less than five years remaining. This calls on all of us to accelerate progress in the achievement of **gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.** We must reinvigorate our commitment to:

(a) Holding ourselves accountable to the commitments we have made;

(b) Adequately resourcing the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls;

(c) Addressing the structural and systemic barriers that impede women and girls from accessing justice; and

(d) Bridging the gap between policy and the lived realities of women and girls across our region.

6. In our endeavour to influence legislative frameworks, and the adoption of gender-responsive policies, we must ask the difficult questions — such as **why gender equality is essential for development.** Honourable Ministers, **the evidence is clear.** Development starts with the **full enjoyment of human rights.** When women have land rights, **food security improves.** When

gender-based violence declines, **health budgets are freed up for other beneficial investments.**

We believe that we should continue to be guided by **three principles:**

(i) The Full Enjoyment of Women's Human Rights. No cultural, religious or traditional arguments should justify denying women and girls their rights. **Every woman, and every girl, has the right to decide over her own body and her own life.** This includes the right to **Comprehensive Sexuality Education**, freedom from gender-based violence, and freedom from all forms of discrimination.

(ii) Equal Representation at All Decision-Making Levels. Development decisions must be made by those affected. Representation should not only be at the level of Parliament and Cabinet — women must also have representation in **corporate boards, trade negotiations, and peace processes**, to mention but a few. **It is of the utmost importance that governments in the SADC region adopt quotas and special measures**, because these deliver tangible results in ensuring the equal representation of women in decision-making. **The evidence within our region attests to this.**

(iii) Financing and the Availability of Resources. Rights and representation mean little — and at times, nothing at all —

without financing. **Gender-Responsive Budgeting is a prerequisite for moving gender from the margins to the core of fiscal policy.** And **unpaid care work must be considered central to social protection policy** — given its substantive value within our economic planning.

Honourable Ministers,

7. Women's economic empowerment must be at the **centre stage of our development planning.** It is a prerequisite for — and carries great potential to deliver — **inclusive economic growth, job creation, and sustainable development across SADC Member States.**

8. There is no doubt that **Gender-Based Violence (GBV) remains a challenge in the SADC region.** It is, therefore, high time that SADC Member States consider **making GBV interventions statutory,** and that we **commit funding for the management of GBV within our national budgets.**

Honourable Ministers,

9. The **Republic of South Africa,** in our capacity as the **Chair of SADC,** had the honour to participate in the **Africa Pre-70th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) Ministerial Consultative Meeting,** held in **November 2025** — at which the **Common Africa Position (CAP),** to be presented at the CSW70 session, was adopted.

10. Ministers agreed that the hosting of the CSW should rotate — and that the African continent should host **CSW74**. The possible hosting of CSW74 in Africa presents an opportunity for Member States of the SADC region to offer to host this session, thus opening up **numerous opportunities for the region to benefit across multiple sectors**.

11. The Republic of South Africa, as the current Chair of SADC, also had the honour to deliver a statement on behalf of the SADC Member States during the proceedings of the **70th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)**, in **March 2026**, in **New York**, under the priority theme: *"Ensuring and strengthening access to justice for all women and girls, including by promoting inclusive and equitable legal systems, eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices, and addressing structural barriers."*

In that statement, I highlighted that the SADC region remains **firmly committed to advancing gender equality through robust regional instruments and frameworks** — including the **SADC Protocol on Gender and Development**, which provides obligations for Member States to **eliminate discrimination**, to **prevent and respond to gender-based violence**, and to **ensure equal access to justice**.

12. I further called upon the global community to ensure **sustained financial and technical support to strengthen**

justice institutions in developing regions — highlighting that investment in justice is a prerequisite for peace, stability, prosperity, and the full realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

13. You will recall, Honourable Ministers, that in **March 2026**, at the 70th Commission on the Status of Women, SADC — under the Chairship of the Republic of South Africa — tabled the **SADC-Sponsored Resolution 68/1 on Women, the Girl Child, and HIV and AIDS for Renewal and Roll-Over**. The Resolution focuses on **eliminating gender inequalities and gender-based abuse and violence**, as well as on **increasing the capacity of women and adolescent girls to protect themselves from the risk of HIV infection**.

14. Most importantly, the Resolution calls on **Governments, the private sector, the international donor community, and the United Nations agencies to intensify financial and technical support for national efforts to end AIDS, and to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls**. This is imperative for the SADC region, which remains the most affected. I impressed upon the UN Member States that the Resolution remains relevant for the global community — and particularly for **Africa, and especially for SADC**, where the **high prevalence of HIV, and the impact of AIDS, remain a daily reality**. I underscored the **urgent need for strengthened**

action to address the disproportionate impact of HIV on women and girls. I further reiterated SADC's commitment to ensuring that the adoption of **Resolution 68/1 translates into meaningful and measurable progress** in advancing the health, the rights, and the empowerment of women and girls across our region.

15. I further highlighted that the **abrupt reductions in the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) funding in 2024/2025** disrupted testing, outreach, and **PrEP expansion** across several Member States. This exposed the **fragility of external financing**, and reinforced the urgency of **strengthened domestic resource mobilisation**. Encouragingly, domestic financing commitments are growing — signalling a vital **transition from donor dependence**. SADC is positioning itself **not as a passive high-burden region, but as a definitive global leader in translating gender and HIV commitments into transformative impact**. With **unwavering political will, coherent policies, and deep, sustained partnerships**, the reaffirmation of **Resolution 68/1** can become a transformative turning point.

16. Let me emphasise that I would have erred if I failed to recognise and appreciate the support from yourselves, from the **Africa Group**, from the **United Nations Member States**, and from **UNAIDS and UN Women**, who were highly facilitative in

the success of the Resolution. I remain indebted to you, colleagues.

Honourable Ministers, and Distinguished Delegates,

17. As I conclude, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the **SADC Secretariat** — led by the **Executive Secretary, His Excellency Mr Elias M. Magosi** — for their diligent coordination, which has been instrumental in bringing us together to advance our shared goals for **gender equality and women's empowerment in the region**.

18. Lastly, I express my sincere gratitude to the senior officials who have tirelessly prepared for our engagement over the past two days. A special appreciation is extended to our strategic partners and stakeholders present today.

I now **declare this Ministerial Meeting of the SADC Ministers of Gender and Women's Affairs officially open**. I wish you a resounding success as you deliberate on our regional gender programme.

I thank you for your attention.

Merci beaucoup. Muito obrigada. Asante sana.