



REPUBLIC OF BOTSWANA

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

DELIVERED BY

**THE SPEAKER OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY
REPUBLIC OF BOTSWANA**

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

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GABORONE, BOTSWANA

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SADC Ministers responsible for Gender and Women's Affairs
SADC Executive Secretary
United Nations Coordinator and UN Agencies Representatives
Members of the Diplomatic Community
Implementing Partners
Captains of Industry
Permanent Secretaries and Director Generals here present
Civil Society Organisations
Our friends from the Media
Distinguished Delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen Good Morning!

Let me start off by expressing my deep appreciation to be part of this memorable occasion where SADC Ministers of Gender and Women's Affairs are gathered to deliberate on a very critical issue; that is; Promotion of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. I would like to underscore that gender equality is not just a phenomenon, but a reality that we all have to embrace if we are to achieve international, continental, regional and national sustainable development.

Honourable Ministers, The Republic of Botswana will this year celebrate fifty years of independence and it is important that we reflect on the progress we have made in developing not only our people as a nation but the SADC region as well. This meeting is therefore very key to us.

Premised on the above, I would like to take you through memory lane of our journey as a Region. As we may be aware, the current connection and rapport was initiated by our forefathers at the Lusaka Declaration on 1st April 1980. The year 2016 therefore marks 36 years of existence as a Region and I trust that we can all attest to the positive development we have made in this period.

On 17th August 1992, in Windhoek, Namibia, Heads of State and Government signed the SADC Declaration and Treaty that effectively transformed the Southern African Development Coordination Conference into the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

Your Excellency's, The main objectives of Southern African Development Community are; to achieve economic development, peace and security, growth, alleviate poverty, enhance the standard and quality of life of the peoples of Southern Africa and support the socially disadvantaged through Regional Integration built on democratic principles, and equitable and sustainable development.

It is evident that as Member States, we have since the formation of SADC been striving towards improving the lives of our people holistically. It is for this reason that in September 1997 SADC Heads of State and Government signed the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development; followed by its Addendum on the Prevention and Eradication of Violence Against Women and Children in September 1998.

In addition, SADC Council of Ministers adopted the SADC Gender Policy of 2007. To reinforce their commitment, SADC Heads of State and Government signed and adopted the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development in August 2008; an instrument that currently guides our National Policies and Programmes.

The United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon in the 2015 Millennium Development Goals Report indicated that; "The MDGs helped to lift more than one billion people out of extreme poverty, to make inroads against hunger, to enable more girls to attend school than ever before and to protect our planet". He further noted that despite all the remarkable gains, inequalities persist and that progress has been uneven. I trust that the same observation applies even at SADC level. This should therefore form the basis of our Regional Post 2015 Development Agenda.

According to the SADC Gender Protocol Barometer 2015, some notable progress has been made in attainment of the twenty eight targets of the Protocol.

The 2015 SADC Gender Protocol Barometer reports positive progress over the past five years with the most in HIV and AIDS sector which gained seven percentage points from 47% in 2011 to 54% in 2015. This reflects the commitment in reducing new HIV and AIDS infections, including Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission. Sexual and Reproductive

Health and Reproductive Rights also improved by five percentage points, with improvement in maternal mortality and contraceptive usage.

Economic justice improved by four percentage points, as more women engaged in business and the workplace. Education and training which was already high made a shift of one percentage point up. Governance also made an upper shift of one percentage point. Other achievements include adoption of legislated quotas for women in Parliament and Local Government in Mauritius, Namibia and Zimbabwe.

Honourable Ministers, though we have registered significant progress as highlighted above, we still have challenges particularly in areas such as child marriages, abortion, sex work and marital rape; women's representation in leadership mainly in political leadership; teenage pregnancy which gravely affects girls education thereby reinforcing the poverty cycle and women's participation in the economy especially in the formal sector.

These challenges require high levels of commitment and resilience by all Member States to develop strong mitigation to effectively realise the desired outcome or results. It is therefore imperative that Member States make deliberate effort to generate strategies to address specific hurdles.

In conclusion Honourable Ministers, I trust that as you review progress on achievement of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in the Region, you will do so in consideration of the current shift and focus for

women's empowerment including the sustainable Development Goals, especially Goal 5 with its seven targets, the African Union agenda 2063 and the Beijing Platform for Action amongst others. Honourable Ministers, I have full confidence in that while you hold the fort, the socio-economic status of our women is bound to change for the better. Let me underscore that there is no better time than now.

I thank you and wish you fruitful deliberations.