



REMARKS BY

ACTING EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF SADC

DR. THEMBINKOSI MHLONGO

**SADC MEETING OF MINISTERS OF EMPLOYMENT AND LABOUR
AND SOCIAL PARTNERS**

VIRTUALLY HOSTED BY THE REPUBLIC OF MOZAMBIQUE

30 APRIL 2021

- Director of Ceremony;
- Minister of Labour and Social Security of the Republic of Mozambique, **Hon. Margarida Adamugy Talapa;**
- Honourable Ministers responsible for Labour and Employment here-present;
- President of the Southern Africa Trade Union Coordination Council (SATUCC), **Ms. Zingiswa Losi;**
- Deputy President of the SADC Private Sector Forum (SPSF), **Mr. Harrington Chibanda;**
- Assistant Director-General of the ILO and Regional Director for Africa, **Ms. Cynthia Samuel-Olonjuwon;**
- The IOM Regional Director for Southern Africa, **Mr. Charles Kwenin;**
- Distinguished Delegates;
- Ladies and Gentlemen;

I feel highly honoured to address you this morning and to welcome you to this virtual meeting of SADC Ministers of Employment and Labour and Social Partners. We are thankful to the Government of Mozambique for organising and hosting this important meeting despite the constraints imposed by the pandemic. We also thank the Honourable Ministers and Social Partners who have prioritised participation in this meeting, despite many other pressing demands.

At this stage, I must mention that the Secretariat greatly appreciated your understanding and support, when this meeting had to be postponed to allow the region to mourn the untimely passing of the late President of the United Republic of Tanzania, His Excellency Dr. John Pombe Joseph Magufuli. Indeed, the late Dr. Magufuli was hugely celebrated and given a profoundly befitting send-off across the region. We now look to continue the work he inspired for the betterment of all SADC citizens. May his soul rest in eternal peace.

The Secretariat finds this year's meeting extremely important for the region as it gives the governments and social partners an occasion to, among other issues, jointly deliberate on and address the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. As per tradition, your meeting will review progress on employment and labour dimensions of regional integration, and consider other pertinent items of global significance.

As Honourable Ministers and Social Partners will be aware, in August 2020, Summit approved the SADC Vision 2050 and Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) (2020-2030), both of which position the Employment and Labour Sector (ELS) as a critical component of regional integration under Pillar 3 on Social and Human Capital Development. It is indeed opportune that, at this meeting, you are set to consider and approve your key sectoral policy instruments, towards realisation of the SADC Vision of “a peaceful, inclusive, competitive, middle to high income industrialised region, where all citizens enjoy sustainable economic well-being, justice and freedom.”

The draft SADC Employment and Labour Policy Framework (2020-2030) and draft SADC Decent Work Programme (2021-2025) provide credible means to address decent work deficits in the region, based on enhanced tripartite cooperation and improved coordination involving social and economic sectors. The principal objective is to increase access to productive and quality jobs, especially for young women and men who continue to face unacceptably high rates of unemployment and working poverty. The SADC Vision can only be realised when decent work is delivered, ensuring that work is not survivalist in nature, but a sustainable and meaningful source of livelihood for the majority. With projections showing that the SADC labour force has grown by more than 25% between 2010 and 2020, there is no doubt that employment provides the greatest opportunity for the majority to participate in and contribute to development. Therefore, I recommend that you approve the draft documents to be presented, in order to pave way for immediate implementation, which must come with improved monitoring and reporting in the Sector in order to maximise impact.

I am happy to inform you that Council has reallocated resources for you and your counterparts in Finance, Trade and Industry, to jointly discuss the employment creation agenda in SADC later this year. This occasion will present a highly significant opportunity for SADC to find pathways to create more and better jobs for the citizens. The Secretariat looks forward to the full support of this Sector in this planned meeting.

Allow me to highlight that, during their August 2020 meeting, the Heads of State and Government approved development of a new SADC Protocol on Employment and Labour. We are confident that the Member States will now define a fully responsive legal framework on the decent work agenda, which takes into account the practical situation and priorities of SADC. I would like to assure the Ministers and Social Partners that the Secretariat will prioritise the development of the Protocol so that the ELS adequately delivers on the Summit directive. As part of this process, we count on Member States to undertake the necessary consultations with all stakeholders at the national level, as part of the roadmap proposed for your consideration.

I am happy that your meeting will consider the impacts of COVID-19 in a very comprehensive way. The report that was prepared for your meeting highlights significant job insecurity and vulnerability in SADC, with an equivalent of 36 million jobs estimated to have been lost through a combination of retrenchments, as well as

reduced wages and working hours. While governments and other actors have responded to the pandemic through commendable and highly ambitious interventions, including unprecedented stimulus packages and public health measures, the pandemic's effects will continue for several years to come, more so for employment and income stability, which largely depends on economic performance. Sectors that depend on global demand, such as mining and agriculture, and those that depend on international travel, such as tourism and hospitality, all of which significantly employ the majority of young people, will remain subdued until at least 2025.

The above means that our governments must continue to invest in employment-focused enterprise recovery packages; and move to introduce and strengthen social protection mechanisms, including unemployment benefit schemes. In these efforts, genuine social dialogue will remain crucial, ensuring that all ideas are considered and that implementation involves everyone. Workplace initiatives to contain the spread of the disease, informed by the public health measures, should continue to be implemented as they are at the heart of maintaining a balance between disease control and preservation of livelihoods and economic stability.

At the regional level, I call upon Member States to deepen their cooperation on labour migration management in order to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 on migrant workers, who are also hard-hit due to the fragile nature of their occupations in most cases. Therefore, I urge you to continue implementing your recently adopted the SADC Labour Migration Action Plan (2020-2025) at national level and to participate in the regional activities as proposed by the Secretariat. This Action Plan gives you a very practical basis to promote collective development in the region, and to make a difference for migrant workers especially at this trying time.

Director of Ceremony, I would like to take this opportunity to commend the International Cooperating Partners (ICPs), notably the ILO and IOM, who continue to support the Member States and Secretariat in a highly responsive and meaningful manner. Their participation at this meeting at very senior levels is also highly appreciated, and we are indeed confident that through continued partnership, significant strides will be made towards decent work in the region, and beyond.

I must also express my appreciation for the efforts being made by Social Partners at the regional level through SPSF and SATUCC. In this regard, the Secretariat takes this opportunity to once again congratulate SPSF for successfully launching the online SADC Labour Law Guide in June 2020, and for having included a highly informative COVID-19 dashboard. The SADC Labour Law Guide is just one example from the ELS, demonstrating that the private sector can play a leading role in regional development processes. The Guide is indeed a very accessible and informative portal on basic labour laws in all SADC Member States. As indicated in the agenda of your meeting, the Secretariat is already working with the ILO to develop an online regional labour market database, that is, the Labour Market Observatory, based on the Labour Law Guide's architecture. On the other hand, SATUCC has been leading advocacy

and actively partnering with governments and employers to make workplaces safe in the wake of COVID-19. Their efforts have gone a long way in ensuring occupational safety and health, including the provision of PPEs especially for frontline workers. This is highly commendable.

As I conclude my remarks, I would like to assure the Ministers and Social partners that the Secretariat remains committed to work closely with Member States throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, making sure that labour markets become a source of resilience for the citizens, as well as a basis for sustainable socio-economic recovery. We are confident that your meeting will add impetus to the work that you are already doing in this regard. Once again, I thank the Honourable Minister Madam Margarida Talapa and her team for making this meeting possible, and for the leadership demonstrated within the Sector. We look forward to your continued support in implementing the outcomes of this meeting.

With these brief remarks, Honourable Ministers and distinguished delegates, it is now my great pleasure to wish you very fruitful deliberations.

I thank you.