



**OPENING REMARKS**

**BY**

**HER EXCELLENCY DR. STERGOMENA LAWRENCE TAX**

**SADC EXECUTIVE SECRETARY**

**ON**

**THE OCCASION OF THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF**

**THE SADC COUNCIL OF MINISTERS**

**VIRTUAL MEETING**

**29 MAY 2020**

**Honourable Prof. Palamagamba John Aidan Mwaluko Kabudi, Minister of Foreign Affairs and East African Cooperation of the United Republic of Tanzania, and Chairperson of the SADC Council of Ministers;**

**Honourable Ministers;**

**Permanent Secretaries and Directors General;**

**SADC Deputy Executive Secretaries;**

**Senior Officials from SADC Member States and SADC Secretariat staff;**

**Representatives of the Media;**

**Ladies and Gentlemen.**

I am greatly honoured to welcome you to this Virtual Meeting of the SADC Council of Ministers. Let me start by expressing our gratitude to the United Republic of Tanzania, the Chairperson of SADC, for the continued cooperation in organizing and servicing these virtual meetings, that have allowed SADC business to continue notwithstanding challenges posed by COVID-19 pandemic. We thank you for providing the needed support and leadership under the challenging environment.

May I also express our gratitude to you, Honourable Ministers, for attending this meeting, despite your very busy work schedules. COVID-19 has brought multiple challenges and responsibilities that require extra-ordinary and innovative approaches to doing business, May I, sincerely commend SADC Member States for the rigorous measures put in place to address and deal with this global pandemic. These measures have indeed, contributed to the containment of the spread of COVID-19 and protection of the citizens of SADC and beyond.

**Honourable Ministers,**

The Secretariat has continued to put in place measures to contain and monitor the spread of COVID-19 in line with the decisions made during your emergency meeting of 6 April 2020. Among others, the mapping of regional manufacturers of essential supplies and equipment for COVID-19, as well as, the needs assessment on medical supplies and medical equipment for COVID-19, were conducted. The information gathered from the mapping exercise, and the needs assessment is being used in the ongoing efforts of mobilizing resources, and in prioritizing procurement of medical supplies and medical equipment from regional manufacturers and suppliers. The information is also being used in enhancing capacities of regional manufacturers in the context of SADC industrialization strategy, which recognizes pharmaceutical value chains as a priority. This initiative will go a long way in improving our region's preparedness to deal with such pandemics and also drive our development agenda.

With regards to resources mobilization, the Secretariat has engaged a number of International Cooperating Partners (ICPs). The aim is to support a regional coordinated approach in the provision of personal protective equipment and other medical equipment to deal with COVID-19. The support is also targeted at regional disaster risk reduction and management. To date, the Secretariat has secured Euro 7.3 million from the German Government, Euro 3.6 million from the European Union, Euro 190,000 under the GIZ/African Union Commission, whereas, the African Development Bank (AfDB), has

considered a support of UA 7 million. Engagement with the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA) are also at an advanced stage. Allow me to extend our gratitude to our Partners.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also made it necessary for the Region to find innovative ways to ensure that pupils and students continue learning. In this regard, SADC and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) have put together an Action Plan to support SADC Member States toward continued learning. The SADC-UNESCO Partnership focuses on making distance learning possible for all learners at all levels, considering the different levels of development in our Member States; create awareness on the importance of health and hygiene, and COVID-19 prevention, through the usage of appropriate information technology.

**Honourable Ministers,**

During your emergency meeting on 6 April 2020, the Council also approved SADC Guidelines on Harmonization and Facilitation of Movement of Essential Goods and Services across borders during the COVID-19 pandemic. While it is encouraging to note that the guidelines have played a critical role in facilitating movement of essential goods and services across borders, and that Member States, public and private sectors are aligning them with national laws and procedures, movement of goods and services across borders has encountered obstacles during this pandemic; and if not addressed effectively, will remain a big a challenge beyond COVID-19. Notable obstacles that have been observed include, non-compliance and/or non-recognition of regional legal frameworks and coordination mechanisms; lack of harmonisation and synchronisation of policies and procedures among, and between Member States; unilateral decisions outside agreed frameworks; uncoordinated operations at the port of entry among border agencies, and different approaches to dealing with epidemiological challenges. All these are resulting into increased cost of doing business, and also negatively affecting the implementation of national and regional programmes, calling for a well-coordinated SADC regional approach to COVID-19. Measures to address these challenges, and a coordinated approach is even more important now, as we are in a post lock-down period, where it is no longer about only essential goods, but facilitation of movement of all goods and services, so as to boost SADC intra-trade, stimulate production, and thus, economic prosperity of our economies.

Recognizing that COVID-19 is a global pandemic, the SADC regional approach should expand to COMESA-EAC-SADC tripartite and, eventually, at continental level. The Secretariat is already working with COMESA and EAC, specifically, in terms of harmonizing and synchronizing regulations and procedures for movement of goods and services, under the Tripartite arrangement. We need to move in unison and avoid unilateral decisions, specifically, with regards to cross-border movement of goods and services.

**Honourable Ministers,**

The Secretariat has carried out a socio-economic impact analysis of COVID-19 on the SADC Region. This analysis has shown that the COVID-19 pandemic will heavily impact

the SADC region across a number of other socio and economic sectors. The decline in the global economy is projected to lead to decline in commodity prices, increase in debt and significant contraction of the SADC economies in 2020. This will reverse the gains on industrial development and trade that the region has made in the last couple of years. Member States are already experiencing disruption of economic activities, including on agricultural production, food security, cross-border trade, tourism, foreign investment flows, macro-economic stability, peace and security, while gender-based violence is also on an increase. Findings also show that, government expenditures on COVID-19 related activities have increased at a time that most of the Member States are facing fiscal challenges.

In view of the finding of the socio-economic impact analysis on SADC economies, a number of measures are recommended for consideration at national and regional levels, which will be tabled for your consideration during the course of this meeting. It is clear that unity and cooperation is very important now than ever if we are to defeat COVID-19 socially and economically.

**Honourable Ministers,**

In relation to the approved 2020/21 Corporate Plan, the Secretariat developed an Emergency Plan, prioritising and frontloading activities to be implemented between March 2020 and October 2020, that takes into account the COVID-19 operating environment. The implementation of this plan has been on-going since March 2020. Given the evolving nature of COVID-19 situation, the Secretariat will continue monitoring the situation and present a report on the impact of COVID-19 on the approved 2020/21 Corporate Plan to Council in August 2020.

**Honourable Ministers,**

Before I conclude, allow to highlight that we are operating in unprecedented times, characterised by a number of challenges and instabilities. The pandemic has come at a time that the SADC region has already been heavily affected by the unfavourable climatic conditions that affected SADC economies leading to food insecurity, poverty and increased inequalities. COVID-19 pandemic has compounded the situation. It must be noted that COVID-19 is likely to remain with us for a considerable period of time. We therefore, need to understand it, learn how to live with it, by putting in place the needed preventive and curative measures. Together, as a united region, we shall, and we must defeat COVID-19. This requires us to remain vigilant and enhance our cooperation in the fight against COVID-19.

Once again, let me commend our Member States for the measures taken to contain the spread of COVID-19, and to address the associated socio-economic hardships. The measures have indeed protected us, citizens of SADC and our livelihoods. May I also remind and encourage SADC citizens to abide by the various measures put in place by our Governments, and the advice from our experts.

It will ungrateful of me, not express our gratitude to frontline staff across the SADC region for their dedication, commitment and selflessness. May I thank and encourage Member States to continue rendering them the necessary support as they continue to discharge their duties, and in doing so, ensure that they do not become victims but victors in the fight against this pandemic.

In conclusion, may I thank the Government of Tanzania, for organizing this important meeting, and the Chairperson of Council, Hon. Prof. Kabudi for the continued guidance since assuming Chairperson-ship in August, 2019. I also thank you, Honourable Ministers, for dedicating to this meeting. Let me also thank the Senior Officials, under the leadership of Ambassador Colonel Ibuge, and the SADC Secretariat staff for the excellent preparation of this meeting.

With these remarks, I look forward to a successful and fruitful meeting.

**Asante sana!**

**I thank you very much.**

**Merci beaucoup!**

**Muito obrigada.**