



STAFF MESSAGE

AT THE OCCASION OF THE FAREWELL CEREMONY FOR HER EXCELLENCY DR STERGOMENA LAWRENCE TAX, THE OUTGOING EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF SADC

Your Excellency, the Executive Secretary, Dr. Stergomena Lawrence Tax;

Your Excellencies, Deputy Executive Secretaries;

Directors and Heads of Unit;

SADC Secretariat Colleagues,

My name is Sibongile Mavimbela, I have the distinct honour of addressing you this morning to deliver the message of my SADC Secretariat colleagues to the outgoing Executive Secretary of SADC – Dr Tax, whom some of us were lucky to meet in person when she arrived at the Secretariat in 2013.

From the outset, I wish to state that our message is that of **joy** as, in Dr Tax, we had a strong and resilient leader who was committed to transforming the Secretariat into a high-performing principal executive institution of SADC. Our message is also that of **hope in the future of this Organisation**, as she leaves the SADC Secretariat on a good standing to implement the RISDP 2020-30, which will, in turn, help the Region to realise the objectives of the SADC Vision 2050.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

About 8 years ago, Dr Tax arrived at an Organisation that did not have a Staff Association. Through her guidance, the Secretariat witnessed the establishment of the very first Staff Association. She worked hard to create a platform for staff to air their views and concerns and, as well, propose ideas that would help the Secretariat to better carry out its mandate. With her efforts, we have been able to access the Executive Secretary and Management to discuss issues affecting us in the workplace without fear of retribution. For the first time, we were able to participate in the Secretariat's Management and Council meetings. We could anonymously deposit messages in suggestion boxes.

We shall not forget the social gatherings and parties she hosted which showed us a different and fun side of her – and that is: a mother, a sister and a friend – as opposed to **'the ES'**. We have always felt welcome at your residence. You even invited us to organise our own gatherings there. Only a mother can do this: taking everything she has for the enjoyment of her children.

And there were sad times too. As an African, a leader, a Christian and a mother, she showed compassion to staff during times of bereavement through physical presence and messages of sympathy. This cannot be an easy task as these sad moments affected people very close to her. But she found strength to give them comfort. We thank her for that.

Dr Tax

During your term of office, you championed several achievements as ably been highlighted in the video we have just seen which all point to our journey towards the future we want.

Indeed, we have come to know you as a true Agent of Change as you promoted establishment and use of new systems and processes at the Secretariat, with the aim of increasing accountability, efficiency and effectiveness.

You have reinforced the Secretariat's work ethic through dedication and professionalism. You were firm but kind as you built the Secretariat's capacity to perform its functions. Your intense scrutiny of Annotated Agendas for Statutory Meetings was instrumental in shaping the quality of the meetings and ultimately the outcome. This is a culture that we will continue to embrace going forward.

You believed in the power of effective communication, as you introduced and upheld regular meetings, retreats, email, calendar of events, Inside SADC Newsletter, portal messages, SADC Success Stories publications and, most recently, the SADC 40-Year Anniversary brochure and celebrations. Interestingly, you keep a Twitter page with 15,500 followers, and have used it to communicate over 3000 tweets on various topics within the scope of your work.

Leading the Secretariat in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic may have been one of the most challenging aspects of your job. However, you put systems in place and introduced COVID-19 protocols to ensure business continuity on the one hand, while ensuring staff safety and welfare on the other hand.

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In closing, we assure you that we will make progress towards reviving the Staff Association. We assure you of our continued and unwavering commitment to the SADC vision, mission, objectives and values.

We, as female staff, take a leaf from your accomplishment as the first female Executive Secretary of SADC and successfully completing your term of office. Having a woman to lead an Organisation like SADC gets the entire society fully on board. I am sure the entire region is enjoying the fruits of this empowerment. We hope many more women will walk in your footsteps in the future.

You proudly carried the torch lit by the Founders of SADC on the 1st April 1980 in Lusaka, Zambia; and as you transition into next page of your life, we wish you good health and happiness. Let me end by quoting an unknown author who said, and I quote:

“From milestones and targets, to motivation and progress, from failures and setbacks, to moving ahead and success, you stood with us through all these things, your leadership is what has given us wings, Farewell”.

Goodbye, Au revoir, Adeus, Kwaheri Mama Tax.

Presented by:

Ms Sibongile Mavimbela

On behalf of SADC Staff