



STATEMENT DELIVERED BY

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MINISTER IN THE PRESIDENCY

ON BEHALF
OF THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT
COMMUNITY GROUP

AT
THE 53RD SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS
OF WOMEN

2 – 13 MARCH 2009
UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS
NEW YORK

Chairperson,
Colleague Ministers,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Member States of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), namely the countries of Angola, Botswana, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, Seychelles, the United Republic of Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Zambia and my own country, South Africa.

We align ourselves with the statement read by the Sudan on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

This year marks important milestones in relation to the 30th anniversary of the CEDAW, 15th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action, and the 10 year anniversary of the Security Council Resolution No. 1325.

Chairperson,

Through our struggles for gender equality and our gains, we have generated a better basis for our demands. SADC believes that gender equality and equity are fundamental human rights and a prerequisite to sustainable development. It is in this regard that all SADC Member States have signed and ratified or acceded to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). SADC Member States have continued to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and other internationally agreed commitments related to the rights of women. Gender equality and the empowerment of women is one of the founding principles of SADC and enshrined in our SADC Treaty (2002).

Although there are gaps and challenges that are hindering progress in attaining full gender equality, we have been greatly honoured by the leadership and important contributions of women in our sub-region. We also take pride in the fact that throughout our history, women of Southern Africa have played a pivotal role in all spheres of society that brought about independence including National liberations and Democracy to many of our countries.

It is for this reason that SADC welcomes the opportunity to participate in the 53rd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women under the themes “the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including care-giving in the context of HIV and AIDS” and “the equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels”, including the emerging issues particularly the financial crisis that are bound to impact negatively on the lives of women, if the opportunity is not created or not taken at advantage of to create a kind of society that we want.

Chairperson,

Promoting equal sharing of responsibilities, including care responsibilities between women and men is a fundamental but challenging aspect of addressing gender equality. The unequal sharing of responsibilities in the private and public sphere has an adverse impact on women as well as men, their families, the economy and society as a whole. It has implications for equality of opportunity in accessing quality health care, in education, in the labour market and in public life, including political participation, as well as for the quality of family life.

In our resolve to mainstream a gender perspective into all aspects of our lives, the SADC Heads of State signed the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development on August 17, 2008. This instrument is hailed as an important step towards the empowerment of women, the elimination of discrimination and achievement of gender equality and equity aimed at enhancing development in the region.

SADC Member States continue to work on making traditional systems and cultural belief more responsive to this gender agenda in the region.

Furthermore to give women a platform for raising awareness on gender based issues, the African Union which SADC Member States belong to has declared 2010 to 2020 a “Decade of Women. In addition to this, the Constitutive Act of the AU recognised the key role that women have played in development. The AU has adopted gender-parity principles in all spheres. Since the Beijing Conference, the AU has adopted important commitments and protocols including: the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, the Solemn Declaration on Gender in Africa, Africa-wide Campaign on Violence against Women and the AU Gender Policy.

Within the context of equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including promoting health and wellbeing, the Protocol contains a number of important commitments to be achieved by 2015 that would ease the burden of the multiple roles played by women in our sub-region. SADC has undertaken to review and adopt policies and enact laws which will ensure equal access, open opportunities for women and men in trade and entrepreneurship, employment, public procurement processes, taking into account the contribution of women in the formal and informal sectors.

Further measures undertaken by SADC include, among others, efforts to ensure equal pay for equal work and equal remuneration for jobs of equal value for women and men. The eradication of occupational segregation and all forms of employment discrimination, the protection and recognition of the economic value and appropriate minimum remuneration of persons engaged in agricultural and domestic work, are important

elements of gender mainstreaming enshrining in the Protocol on Gender and Development.

SADC has also undertaken to prohibit the unfair dismissal or denial of recruitment on the grounds of pregnancy or maternity leave and to provide protection and benefits for women and men during maternity and paternity leave.

Chairperson,

The burden of disease; communicable – including TB, HIV and AIDS, and Malaria, non-communicable diseases – e.g. Diabetes, cardiovascular, poor nutrition, injuries and accidents; have accentuated the need for care. Care work has thus become a major source of inequality which brings to the fore the intergenerational challenges of promoting equal sharing or responsibilities between women and men. According to the Secretary-General's report, before responsibilities are shared between women and men, they are also shifted to different generations of women. For example, many older women, such as grandmothers, take on the responsibilities for care-giving. In Southern Africa, studies have shown that two thirds of primary caregivers including caregiving for the disabled in households surveyed were women and one quarter of these were over 60 years of age.

SADC has thus undertaken to develop and implement policies and programmes which encourage the Region to emphasise on prevention, treatment, care and support as a comprehensive approach to the burden of disease. Adequate resources need to be allocated for the effective implementation of these programmes.

Chairperson,

The participation of women in politics and decision making is one of the critical areas of concern in the SADC region. It has been demonstrated globally that the under-representation of women in politics and decision making positions has an adverse effect on national development as a whole, manifesting in inequities in legal rights, power sharing, decision making, as well as access to, and control of productive resources. Commitment to address these imbalances has been demonstrated by SADC at the highest political level. Women's empowerment initiatives aimed at protecting, uplifting and enhancing the quality of life for women and girls in the region continue to be developed and implemented.

SADC committed itself to ensuring that by 2015, at least fifty percent of decision-making positions in the public and private sectors are held by women. In that regard guidelines are being developed, in consultation with Member States, to scale up the achievement of the 50% target of women participation and representation at all levels by 2015. Furthermore, we have agreed that all legislative and other measures will be accompanied by public awareness campaigns in order to demonstrate the vital link between equal representation and participation of women and men in decision-making positions, democracy, good governance and citizen participation. We shall be supportive and vigilant in monitoring progress in this regard.

Chairperson,

In our sub-region, despite the ongoing challenge of poverty in the region, women continue to make strides in economic participation.

SADC fully believes that social justice and social mobilization can only be achieved through critical partnerships between women and men, government, the private sector, the non-governmental sector and civil society, and the manner in which these partnerships are articulated.

We call upon the international community to honour its commitments to Official Development Assistance, debt relief and the access to markets and to give opportunities particularly to women entrepreneurs, especially under the current economic situation. Increased development assistance in such areas as education, health and job creation is vital towards eliminating gender disparities, gender discrimination, including violence against women is important.

Chairperson,

In conclusion, it is our hope that as the 53rd Session of the Commission deliberates on its agenda in the next two weeks it will provide effective policy guidelines on how we can move forward in addressing the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men.

SADC remains committed to this process.

I thank you