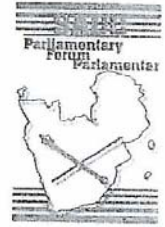


# SADC PARLIAMENTARY FORUM

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## COMMUNIQUÉ 23<sup>RD</sup> PLENARY ASSEMBLY OF THE SADC PARLIAMENTARY FORUM HELD AT BLANTYRE, MALAWI 17<sup>TH</sup> – 26<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER, 2007

1. The 23<sup>rd</sup> Plenary Assembly of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Parliamentary Forum (the Forum) was held in Blantyre, Malawi under the theme: *Parliamentary Engagement on Priority Regional Issues: Leadership on the HIV and AIDS Pandemic*. The Plenary Assembly coincided with the commemoration of the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the approval of the establishment of the Forum by the Summit of SADC Heads of State and Government in September, 1997 in Blantyre, Malawi.
2. The Plenary Assembly was attended by 10 Presiding Officers and 67 Members of Parliament representing the following Member Parliaments of the Forum:

Angola	Namibia
Botswana	South Africa
Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)	Swaziland
Malawi	Tanzania
Mauritius	Zambia
Mozambique	Zimbabwe
3. The Plenary Assembly was officially opened on Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> October, 2007 by the President of the Republic of Malawi, His Excellency, Dr. Bingu wa Mutharika. In his address entitled "*The Relevance of National Parliaments in Multiparty Democracy*", President Mutharika recognised parliaments as catalysts for the enhancement of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Recalling the significance of the city of Blantyre as the place where the Summit of SADC heads of state and government approved the establishment of the Forum, the President affirmed the role of the Forum as an important platform through which Members of Parliament exchange experiences on best parliamentary practices and procedures to underpin the relevance of national Parliaments in meeting the aspirations of the peoples of southern Africa.
4. Noting that the SADC region is the epicentre of HIV and AIDS, the President expressed satisfaction with the choice of the theme of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Plenary Assembly. He, therefore, urged parliaments to provide the required

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political leadership in the fight against the epidemic. The President called for a multi-faceted, comprehensive and holistic approach which takes into account the economic, socio-cultural and political dimensions of the epidemic. Giving the example of his own country Malawi, which has identified the challenge of HIV and AIDS as one of the development priorities, the President pledged his personal support for the Forum's engagement in the fight against HIV and AIDS.

5. The President also commended the Forum for its election observation programme, advocacy for gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as the fight against corruption, among other initiatives. Finally, the President underscored the principle of separation of powers between the Executive and Legislature as the bedrock of parliamentary democracy and one that, in his own words, provides "a framework for a *modus vivendi* among the three branches of government."
6. The official opening ceremony was also addressed by the Chairperson of the Forum, Honourable Patrick Balopi, who is also the Speaker of the National Assembly of Botswana. The Chairperson expressed the Plenary Assembly's appreciation to the President for officially opening the 23<sup>rd</sup> Plenary Assembly. Speaker Balopi acknowledged with appreciation the presence, at the official opening, of representatives of the different political parties in Malawi. The Chairperson also thanked the President, Government and people of Malawi for their long standing generosity to neighbouring countries in times of need such as during droughts and assistance to refugees.
7. The Chairperson drew the attention of President Mutharika to the decision of the Forum to present the Speaker of the National Assembly of Namibia, Honourable Theo-Ben Gurirab for the presidency of the IPU. Noting that since the establishment of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), Africa has not had as many opportunities of leading this important global inter-parliamentary organisation as other regions of the world, the Chairperson requested President Mutharika's support and through him that of his colleagues, SADC heads of state and government to ensure that Honourable Gurirab's candidature is successful.
8. Welcoming delegates the host Speaker, Honourable Louis Chimango thanked the Forum for honouring the Parliament of Malawi with hosting the 23<sup>rd</sup> Plenary Assembly. Honourable Chimango identified underdevelopment as one of the biggest challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He challenged parliamentarians to take a lead in the on-going efforts to address that challenge and those of poverty, HIV and AIDS, malaria and other diseases. He also underscored the importance of stronger regionalism in the face of globalisation.
9. The Acting Chairperson of the Regional Women's Parliamentary Caucus, Honourable Lourdes Veiga also addressed the official opening ceremony. Recalling the signing of the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development in September 1997 in Blantyre, Malawi, Honourable Veiga



recognised Malawi as the cradle of the adoption of the road-map on gender equality, which has become a regional framework for gender equality and women's empowerment, and a means for the SADC region to work on, in pursuit of a shared future and partnership between women and men in our region.

10. Noting that the Declaration has since been transformed into a draft Protocol and awaits the endorsement of SADC heads of state and government, Honourable Veiga appealed to President Mutharika to engage his counterparts in SADC, to ensure that the signing of the Protocol into a legally binding instrument is not delayed any further. Further noting that the Constitution of Malawi is among the few progressive constitutions in the region with regard to guarantees on gender equality, Honourable Veiga called upon President Mutharika to provide leadership in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in Malawi.
11. The Speaker of the National Assembly of Mauritius, Honourable Rajkeswur Purryag proposed a Vote of Thanks on behalf of delegates to the 23<sup>rd</sup> Plenary Assembly. In his remarks, Honourable Purryag expressed appreciation for President Mutharika's personal commitment and that of his government to the fight against HIV and AIDS. Speaker Purryag also called the attention of the President to the imminent deadline for the conclusion of African Caribbean Pacific (ACP)/European Union (EU) negotiations on Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) (31<sup>st</sup> December, 2007) and the abrupt disruption of ACP exports inevitably leading to trade and revenue losses, and consequent suffering among the peoples of the region.
12. Pursuant to the theme, the Plenary Assembly received and debated an insightful presentation on the impact of HIV and AIDS on Children, Youth and Families. The presentation was made by Professor Linda Richter of the Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa. The Plenary Assembly noted with concern that children living with HIV/AIDS comprise 6% of all people living with HIV/AIDS and child deaths currently stand at 16%. Against this background, the Plenary Assembly concluded that addressing the plight of children affected and infected by AIDS should be treated as an urgent priority.
13. The Plenary Assembly concluded that prevention of infections among adults would help prevent HIV and AIDS infections among children. Of particular concern also was the fact that gender inequalities, negative attitudes and stereotypes significantly increase the vulnerability of young women to HIV and AIDS. This, the Plenary Assembly observed, was one of the primary drivers of the epidemic.
14. Noting that according to 2006 statistics from UNAIDS, 90% of the infections in children are a result of preventable Mother to Child Transmission, the Plenary Assembly called for the urgent improvement in access to Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission (PMTCT) programmes, HIV testing of infants, treatment for mothers and children and family based approaches to address the epidemic. In relation to prevention of

new infections especially among young women, the Plenary Assembly recommended the improvement of access to voluntary counselling and testing for young adolescents.

15. The Plenary Assembly also felt that the impact of AIDS on children could be mitigated by expanding support to pre-schools and schools, establishment of social protection mechanisms, development of integrated responses and services as well as closer collaboration between governments, donors and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). The Plenary Assembly further observed the need to commission research to test the feasibility of interventions on a large scale to provide scientific, operational and economic outcomes that are user-friendly to parliamentarians and SADC countries in general.
16. Recalling the approval of the establishment of the Forum in 1997 by the Summit of SADC heads of state and government and the understanding that the long term objective of the Forum is to transform into a regional Parliament, the Plenary Assembly reiterated its call for the speedy implementation of this objective. In this regard, the Plenary Assembly resolved to renew the Forum's engagement with all structures of SADC to build consensus on this important regional imperative.
17. Following the decision of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Plenary Assembly of June, 2007, endorsing the Speaker of the National Assembly of Namibia, Honourable Theo-Ben Gurirab as a candidate for the presidency of the IPU, the Plenary Assembly noted with appreciation the subsequent endorsement of Honourable Gurirab as Africa's candidate by the Africa Group in the IPU as it is Africa's turn.
18. The Plenary Assembly noted with regret the recent decision of the Summit of SADC heads of state and government to delay the signing of the draft SADC Protocol on Gender and Development pending further consultations. In this regard, the Plenary Assembly called for the speedy conclusion of the envisaged consultations trusting that the draft Protocol would be signed at the next meetings of the SADC Summit in 2008.
19. The Plenary Assembly noted the imminent December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2007 deadline for signing EPAs between the ACP/EU member states and acknowledged that EPAs would have negative far reaching consequences on the development and integration of the ACP states including SADC. It was observed that the EPA negotiations are seriously undermining the SADC integration process as the Community is now divided into various negotiating blocks thus detracting from the regional integration agenda and process enshrined in the SADC Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP).
20. The Plenary Assembly also noted with concern that the end of preferential market access to EU markets accompanied by full reciprocal trade with the EU as proposed in the EPAs will undoubtedly result in loss of revenue for many ACP countries including the Least Developed Countries



(LDCs). As a result, government's ability to provide essential goods and services for the citizens would be undermined and domestic taxes would have to be increased to compensate for revenue losses thus further impoverishing the already poor citizens thus undermine the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).


21. The Plenary Assembly underscored the need for HIV and AIDS issues to be mainstreamed into the negotiations and implementation of the EPAs in order to address the issue of affordability and accessibility of medicines. Parliaments should encourage their governments to commit 15% of their budgets to healthcare as agreed to in the African Union's Abuja Declaration and, in the same breath, also take advantage of the flexibility provided for within the Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs);
22. The Plenary Assembly observed that while the General System of Preferences (GSPs) would not benefit the ACP countries, the Everything But Arms (EBAs) deal offered to the LDCs is but a unilateral offer by the EU which could be withdrawn at will and should therefore not be regarded as a permanent solution.
23. Given the importance to trade, development and integration, and in view of the above, the Plenary Assembly called upon the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly meeting in Kigali, Rwanda scheduled to take place in November 2007 to pass a resolution to give ACP regions more time to conclude EPA negotiations. The Plenary Assembly also recommended that the EU be requested to urgently take all necessary steps together with the ACP members including requesting a waiver from the WTO in order to avoid disrupting ACP exports as from 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2008.. It is further recommended that the opportunity created by the Africa–Europe Summit in December, 2007 in Lisbon, Portugal should also be used to pursue the same matter.
24. Mindful of the legitimate and required role of parliaments in the ratification, domestication and oversight of the EPAs, upon signature, the Plenary Assembly called on parliamentarians to commit themselves to continue the discussion on EPAs in their respective parliaments, involving their governments and other stakeholders such as civil society and the business community. In the same breath, parliamentarians were urged to use available opportunities such as moving motions in their respective assemblies, requesting trade Ministers to account with regard to EPAs, putting EPAs on the agenda of relevant portfolio Committees and requesting trade negotiators and other stakeholders to appear before the respective portfolio Committees as may be necessary.
25. The Plenary Assembly noted with satisfaction, progress made by the Parliamentary Leadership Centre (PLC) in developing and implementing training and capacity building for the national Parliaments of SADC. Noting the need for adequate resources to be availed to the PLC to ensure its long term sustainability, the Plenary Assembly welcomed the on-going development of a 5-year Business Plan and related Resource Envelop for the PLC, and called for the speedy finalisation of these important road maps.

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29. Finally, the Plenary Assembly thanked His Excellency, the President, Dr. Bingu wa Mutharika, the Government, the Right Honourable Speaker Louis J. Chimango, Members of the National Assembly and the people of the Republic of Malawi in general, for successfully organising and hosting the 23<sup>rd</sup> Plenary Assembly. The Plenary Assembly also expressed its appreciation for the generous hospitality extended to all delegates during the just-ended meetings.

29. The 24<sup>th</sup> Plenary Assembly will be held in June, 2008.

  
Done at Blantyre, Malawi  
25<sup>th</sup> October, 2007