

SADC PARLIAMENTARY FORUM

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STATEMENT FROM THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE SADC-PF ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF FORESTS

21 MARCH 2024

Dear Colleagues and Partners,

It gives me great pleasure to present this message to the member parliaments of the Forum and its partners as we mark International Day of Forests, which is being observed under the theme: “Forests and Innovation: New Solutions for a Better World.”

As representatives of the Southern African region's parliamentary bodies, we unite on the International Day of Forests to recognise the vital role that forests play in sustaining life on Earth and supporting the well-being of our communities.

In addition to acting as crucial carbon sinks that lessen the effects of climate change, forests are vital habitats for biodiversity, offering safety to innumerable plant and animal species. Forty-one (41%) of the total land area of the SADC region is covered by natural forests. Millions of people in our region rely on forests for their livelihoods and cultural legacy including for the provision of food, medicine, shelter as well as fostering customs and traditional practices. According to an analysis by the World Bank, the forestry sector contributes an average of between 4% and 19% to the GDPs of seven member states in the SADC region.

We are however, deeply concerned by the alarming rate of deforestation and forest degradation in our region, driven by unsustainable land-use practices, illegal logging, agricultural expansion and infrastructure development. This destruction not only threatens biodiversity and ecosystems but also exacerbates climate change, leading to adverse impacts on weather patterns, water cycles, and human health.

We call upon our governments, civil society, and the private sector to prioritise the conservation, restoration, and sustainable management of forests in Southern Africa. This includes strengthening protected area networks, implementing land-use planning and zoning regulations, promoting agroforestry and sustainable agriculture practices, and supporting community-based forest management initiatives.

In line with this year's theme, Parliamentarians have an indispensable role to play in championing policies that harness the power of innovation and technology to develop new and effective solutions for forest conservation and sustainable management. We must, through our legislative functions, support initiatives that seek to explore innovative financing mechanisms to incentivise sustainable forest management and conservation efforts anchored on engagement with local communities as key stakeholders.

Furthermore, we emphasise the importance of regional cooperation and collaboration in combating deforestation and forest degradation, including through the implementation of the SADC Protocol on Forestry, REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) and the Bonn Challenge.

On this International Day of Forests, let us reaffirm our commitment to protecting and restoring the world's forests, recognising their intrinsic value and their crucial role in building a sustainable future for generations to come.

Yours faithfully,

Boemo SEKGOMA (Ms)
SECRETARY GENERAL

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