

SADC PARLIAMENTARY FORUM

Parliament Gardens • Erf 578 Love Street
Private Bag 13361 • Windhoek • NAMIBIA
Tel.: 264-61-287 0000 • E-mail: info@sadcpf.org
Website: www.sadcpf.org



All official correspondence should be addressed to the Secretary General

STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY GENERAL ON INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 08 MARCH 2026

It is with immense pleasure that I release this Statement to Member Parliaments, partners and other stakeholders to commemorate International Women's Day.

As we commemorate this important day, we are reminded of the urgent need to address the persistent barriers facing women and girls across the SADC region. They continue to confront entrenched inequalities that limit their participation and undermine their rights. Regional data show that 17% have experienced forced sex in their lifetime, and one in three has faced intimate partner violence in the past year. Women make up around 70% of the informal economy, where social protection remains weak, and 30% of young women are married before age 18. Many girls also drop out of school due to early pregnancy, child marriage, and poverty.

These realities reflect deeply rooted norms and structural barriers that deny women and girls safety, opportunity, and dignity—undermining not only individual lives but also sustainable development, democratic governance, and regional stability. Justice, therefore, requires confronting discriminatory laws, entrenched practices, and social norms that perpetuate inequality. With more than half of survivors never seeking help, barriers to justice remain pervasive and institutional responses are inadequate. This places a clear responsibility on parliamentarians to legislate boldly, strengthen oversight, and ensure that institutions deliver justice impartially and effectively so that every woman and girl in the SADC region can live free from fear and be empowered with opportunity.

However, rights and justice demand decisive, sustained action. This means investing in girls' education, expanding women's economic opportunities, and ensuring their equal representation in leadership—areas where inequality persists. It also requires that women's voices shape decisions and that justice systems respond swiftly and sensitively to violations. Strengthening data systems is equally critical. In 2025, SADC Member States renewed their commitment to improving GBV data collection and reporting, recognising that reliable, timely data is essential for prevention, accountability, and targeted interventions

The 2026 International Women's Day theme urges us to move beyond commitment to full implementation by affirming rights through strong legal protections for women and girls, delivering justice through equitable access to health, education, and economic opportunities, and advancing representation by ensuring women's full participation at every level of governance.

A handwritten signature in black ink, located at the bottom right of the page. The signature is stylized and appears to be the name of the Secretary General.

The SADC PF has taken decisive steps to help Member States dismantle structural barriers. Through the SADC Model Law on Gender-Based Violence (2021) and the SADC Model Law on Eradicating Child Marriage (2016), which set 18 as the minimum marriage age with no exceptions, the Forum continues to champion harmonised, gender-responsive legislation. To strengthen accountability, the SADC PF has also developed a regional monitoring framework and digital dashboard that enable real-time tracking of child marriage reforms and support evidence-based decision-making across the region.

As we commemorate International Women’s Day, the SADC PF reaffirms its unwavering commitment to the call: **Rights. Justice. Action. For ALL Women and Girls.** This message underscores that equality is essential, justice is non-negotiable, and action cannot be delayed. The Forum further renews its dedication to advancing the objectives of the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, the SADC Regional Strategy and Framework of Action on GBV (2018–2030), and the AU’s Agenda 2063 and Maputo Protocol, recognising these instruments as central to achieving lasting gender equality and protecting the rights of all women and girls across the region.

We urge governments, civil society, the private sector, and citizens to work together to build a region where no woman is silenced, no girl is left behind, and equality becomes the foundation of shared progress.

The SADC PF remains steadfast in promoting gender-responsive laws, strengthening parliamentary oversight, and fostering strong parliamentary leadership that safeguards women and girls, dismantles structural barriers, and drives inclusive and sustainable development.

Happy International Women’s Day to All.

Yours sincerely,



Boemo M SEKGOMA
SECRETARY GENERAL

