

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

OPENING CEREMONY

**54TH SADC PARLIAMENTARY FORUM
PLENARY ASSEMBLY SESSION**

SPEECH BY HON PRAVIND KUMAR JUGNAUTH

PRIME MINISTER

WEDNESDAY 22 NOVEMBER 2023 AT 1030 HRS

**VENUE: SIR HARILAL VAGHJEE MEMORIAL HALL,
GOVERNMENT HOUSE, PORT LOUIS**

Hon. Roger Mancienne, President of the SADC Parliamentary Forum and Speaker of the National Assembly of Seychelles,

Hon. Sooroojdev Phokeer, Speaker of the National Assembly of Mauritius,

Hon Regina Esparon, Chairperson of the Regional Women's Parliamentary Caucus,

Hon Speakers and Heads of delegations of Member Parliaments present,

Colleagues Ministers,

Parliamentary Private Secretaries and Members of Parliament of Mauritius,

Chairperson of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly,

Madam Secretary General of the SADC Parliamentary Forum,

Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Distinguished participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning.

I am deeply honoured as Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius and Leader of the House in our National Assembly to address this 54th Plenary Assembly of the Southern African Development Community Parliamentary Forum.

At the outset, I wish to extend my warm welcome to all the Parliamentarians and delegates who have travelled from various parts of the SADC region to attend this landmark event. I hope Mauritius has been

hospitable to you so far and I am certain that the National Assembly of Mauritius, under the leadership of Honourable Speaker Sooroojdev Phokeer, has catered for all necessary arrangements to ensure that this Plenary Assembly is a memorable one for all of you and reinforces SADC unity. I also hope that you will have the opportunity to explore our diverse tourist attractions and experience the warmth of our people during your stay in our beautiful island country.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is apposite that the Plenary Assembly is taking place in Mauritius at a time when our country is occupying the Vice-Presidency of the SADC Parliamentary Forum, through Hon. Marie Joanne Sabrina Tour, Deputy Chief Government Whip. I wish to thank Hon. Tour for her sterling contributions in efficiently coordinating matters at the level of the Executive Committee of the SADC Parliamentary Forum for the Plenary Assembly to successfully take place in our country.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Occasions like the Plenary Assembly underscore the fact that, while you represent your respective countries and National Parliaments as Parliamentarians, you are united by a shared commitment to promote regional cooperation and solidarity, in line with the SADC Agenda.

I wish to reiterate the unwavering commitment of Mauritius to the principles and values of the SADC Parliamentary Forum as the apex inter-parliamentary body of the region. We view the Forum as an indispensable platform for advancing parliamentary cooperation within SADC. Our commitment to SADC is resolute, and we remain fully committed to working closely with other fellow Member States to collectively tackle both regional and global challenges that our region faces.

Indeed, parliamentary cooperation and diplomacy are pivotal in our joint efforts to overcome the pressing regional and global challenges that pose threats to regional stability and prosperity. Parliaments play a central role in establishing and strengthening the vital link between our governments and the citizens we serve. This connection with the citizenry forms the foundation of our democratic systems across the region.

I commend the SADC Parliamentary Forum for consistently showing its commitment to actively engaging the region's citizens in various matters of concern and interest. This commitment is exemplified through initiatives such as public hearings, which I understand are gaining popularity among both citizens and stakeholders.

The theme of the 54th Plenary Assembly, which is 'The Role of Parliaments in Promoting Coordination for Enhanced Disaster Risk Reduction and Recovery Planning in the SADC Region', is both timely and

relevant as it underscores the pivotal role that Parliaments play in addressing the ever-growing challenges posed by natural disasters and climate change within our region. The SADC region is no stranger to the grim realities of natural disasters and their devastating impacts on our individual countries and local communities. We have directly witnessed the catastrophic effects of cyclones, droughts, and floods which have wreaked havoc in our region.

These natural disasters have not only caused extensive damage to vital infrastructure but have also claimed numerous lives. They have disrupted communities, placed a heavy burden on our economies, and most significantly, eroded the progress we have made in our development endeavours. These disasters, further exacerbated by the looming threat of climate change, have highlighted the urgent need to enhance our disaster risk reduction and recovery planning efforts. They have also underscored the interconnectedness of our countries and the need for regional cooperation and coordination in addressing the associated challenges.

As representatives of the people, Parliaments and individual Parliamentarians hold a unique and critical position of influence and responsibility. Parliaments, in their role as guardians of democracy, are entrusted with the solemn duty to not only enact laws and shape public

policies but also to allocate resources judiciously. In carrying out these responsibilities, they play a crucial role in ensuring that the voices of our citizens are not only heard but also actively addressed. In times of disasters, this duty assumes even greater significance.

It is the legislature's fundamental responsibility to ensure that our countries have the necessary legal and policy frameworks to mitigate risks, respond to disasters effectively, and facilitate recovery and reconstruction. Moreover, Parliaments must serve as the primary platform for robust and informed engagements on disaster management strategies and to ensure that our laws and policies are adaptive and resilient.

The role of the legislature extends beyond the realm of legislation. It is essential for the Parliaments to actively facilitate partnerships among key stakeholders, including governments, civil society, the private sector and international organisations, in order to contribute to a comprehensive approach to disaster risk reduction.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Disasters know no border, which means that countries in the region need to adopt a transboundary approach in their perspectives and responses. This includes sharing knowledge, best practices, and resources. The

SADC region is a community of nations, and it is through unity, solidarity, and collaboration that we can effectively address the challenges posed by climate change and disasters.

Accordingly, it is imperative for the SADC Parliamentary Forum and National Parliaments to advocate for the implementation of both the SADC regional and global disaster risk reduction and recovery planning frameworks. These frameworks not only provide comprehensive strategies for addressing the challenges posed by natural disasters but also offer guidelines for coordinating efforts among SADC member states and international partners. Through this approach, Parliamentarians will make a significant contribution to reducing the impact of disasters and ensuring long-term recovery and development, particularly in the context of the escalating challenges associated with climate change.

By giving top priority to advocating for the integration of disaster risk reduction and climate adaptation into all aspects of national development plans, Parliaments will contribute to building resilience and ensuring that our investments in infrastructure, education, and healthcare are guided by risk considerations and are sustainable.

Due to the constant threat of extreme weather events, the Government of Mauritius has been swift to enact the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act in 2016 which established a statutory Council and

a Strategic Framework to deal with mitigating the risks of disasters and to prepare for recovery. Our National Policy on Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (2020-2030) adopts a modern approach that is community-centered and tailor-made to empower individuals to build resilience to surmount the adverse consequences of natural disasters. I am certain that the presenters from the relevant national authorities will be able to give more details on the strategies and guidelines which are adopted by Mauritius.

Accordingly, I am confident that the theme of this Plenary Assembly will enlighten SADC Parliamentarians on the significance of early preparations in disaster management and will engage in lively and productive deliberations on the subject. Without doubt, the Resolutions of this Plenary Assembly will contribute to making the SADC region a safer place that is conscious of the need for climate change governance as well as disaster preparedness.

I am also alive to the fact that this Plenary Assembly will be coinciding with the International Day for the Elimination of violence against Women which will be commemorated on this 25th November 2023. I am pleased to share that my Government adopts a zero tolerance approach with respect to all forms of gender-based violence. In this respect, the theme of this Plenary Assembly also resonates with the

protection of women since it is well known that climate disasters tend to aggravate the circumstances and vulnerabilities of women who may lose shelter, their possessions or even their employment pursuant to extreme weather events around the world. Without doubt, there is no place for violence against women in the 21st century and it is positive to note that this august Assembly will add further momentum to the elimination of violence against women in Southern Africa and beyond.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate that the theme of this 54th Plenary Assembly challenges all of us to rise to the occasion and demonstrate our commitment to the well-being of our people and the sustainable development of our region. It calls upon us to be proactive and forward-thinking in our legislative efforts, putting disaster risk reduction and recovery planning at the heart of our parliamentary agendas.

By working together collaboratively, Parliaments can make a significant difference and contribute to the creation of a more resilient, prosperous, and sustainable SADC region.

I have now the honour to declare the 54th Plenary Assembly Session of the SADC Parliamentary Forum officially open and wish you all fruitful deliberations.

I thank you for your kind attention.
