

REPUBLIC OF BOTSWANA

**Statement by
H.E. MR. FESTUS MOGAE
President of the Republic of Botswana**

**Officially opening the 2002 SADC
Consultative Conference**

Monday 28 October, 2002

Gaborone

Madam Chairperson
Honourable Ministers
The Executive Secretary of SADC
International Cooperating Partners
Excellencies Heads of Diplomatic Missions and International Organisations
Honourable Members of Parliament
Distinguished Delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen

1. I am delighted to welcome you all to Botswana. I am particularly pleased to extend a special welcome to our cooperating partners. It is an honour to have you here and it is my hope that your visit will be both enjoyable and memorable. Your presence at this Consultative Conference is a demonstration of the continued commitment by your respective countries and organisations to the partnership and co-operation with SADC. It is a partnership that we the SADC Member States greatly value, and are determined to ensure, that it is maintained for the mutual benefit of all our peoples.
2. Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen, poverty is one of the greatest challenge facing the world today. It is against this background that SADC chose poverty reduction as one of its priority areas. I am comforted by the fact that there is universal consensus on sustainable development, as encapsulated in. the United Nations Millennium Declaration goals.
3. The challenge therefore is to' translate the goals into concrete improvements in the general living standards of the people and sustainable poverty reduction. It is pleasing to note that the international community is placing sustainable development at the top of its agenda as demonstrated by the resolutions of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the Summit on Financing for Development, the UN Special Session on HIV/AIDS and initiatives such as the New Partnership for Africa's Development.
4. The theme *"SADC institutional reform for poverty reduction through regional integration"* is appropriate and timely for both our region and the international community. Poverty reduction and the upliftment of living standards should be the concern of all development stakeholders.
5. Poverty reduction should underpin development strategies of all of us here. More importantly our approaches should be well co-ordinated and mutually consistent at the country and regional levels in order to optimise the development gains. If poverty is at the centre of development, it becomes appropriate to benchmark our various endeavours including SADC institutional reforms on their impact on poverty.

6. Madam Chairperson, poverty reduction, economic growth and development, as well as employment creation are inextricably linked. Most developing countries have come to recognize the vital role which regional co-operation and integration could play in achieving faster economic growth and development, both at regional and individual country levels, and in facilitating their integration into the global economy.
7. The support of our International Co-operating partners, as key players in development, is paramount for regional co-operation and integration. The presence of many of these partners at this conference gives us hope that we can count on their increased collaboration and concrete assistance.
8. Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguished Delegates, SADC is currently undergoing widespread and far-reaching institutional reforms, which are aimed at making the organization more efficient and more responsive to the numerous challenges faced by the region. The new structure of SADC, which was approved at an extra-ordinary Summit of SADC Heads of State and Government in March .2001, in Windhoek, Namibia, has objectives and a common agenda whose main elements include, inter alia, the promotion of sustainable and equitable economic growth and socio-economic development, that will ensure poverty alleviation, with the ultimate objective of its eradication. The challenge, therefore, is to translate this into concrete action.
9. SADC has already embarked on two major exercises, namely, the development of ' the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) and the Study on the new SADC Organizational, Structure, which require support from the international community. Such support may be in the form of technical assistance to enhance both national and regional capacities; support for regional networking as well as inter-regional exchange of information and experiences; assistance for promotion of cross-border investments; and assistance for coordination of macro-economic policies.
10. I must hasten to say, however that, whatever support measures there may be, if our national policies and strategies are not consistent with our objectives and do not emphasise the development of human resources or human capabilities, it will be very difficult to compete effectively with the rest of the world. If we cannot compete internationally, the growth of our economies will be constrained with consequent adverse effects on poverty reduction efforts.
11. Chairperson, poverty can have implications on the process of institutional reforms. These include political, social and human development, food security, arid trade and investment. On the political front, SADC is making concerted efforts to consolidate democratic governance and the establishment of a sustainable and effective mechanism for conflict prevention, management and resolution.

12. The recent positive developments such as the ending of conflicts augur well for peace and stability. Peace and stability are a sine-qua-non for sustainable development.

The signing of a cease-fire agreement between UNITA and the Government of Angola in April 2002 and the cease-fire agreements signed between the DRC Government and various parties to the conflict would, if they held, herald the dawn of a conducive environment for development. We applaud the efforts made by the Governments of Angola and the DRC, as well as the international community, in the restoration of peace in the region.

13. On the social and human development front, the HIV/AIDS pandemic in the Southern African region continues to be a major developmental challenge. The infections have tended to concentrate mostly in the younger age cohorts who constitute the economic work force. This has had a major impact on the economic productivity of the people of this region and on development in general. The impact has been most onerous on the health sector. This will eventually have negative implications on the ability and capacity of other sectors to deliver on their individual mandates.
14. Given this scenario, SADC has accorded high priority to HIV/AIDS and charged the health sector, among others, with the responsibility of ensuring an adequate response. The health sector has since developed a Strategic Framework and Programme of Action on HIV/AIDS for 2000 - 2004. The regional programme continues to mobilise resources from both Member States and the international community to fund the implementation of the framework. There are, however, funding gaps that still remain.
15. One of the latest efforts to address this gap, by the SADC Health Sector, involved the submission of the SADC proposals on HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and malaria, to the Global HIV/AIDS Fund. SADC Member States are also making other efforts to respond to the pandemic although this is now being undermined by the lethargic rate of economic growth and the famine within the region. I, therefore, wish to appeal to the international community to significantly increase assistance for combating HIV/AIDS and together with us ensure that HIV/AIDS concerns become an integral thrust of their and our policies and programmes.
16. Madam Chairperson, the challenge posed by the food crisis in the region is a matter of serious concern. The SADC region faces a cereal deficit of 5.19 million tonnes. The number of people affected by the food crisis is estimated to rise from 4.3 million in April 2002 to 14.4 million by March 2003. Although currently the worst affected countries are Malawi, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Lesotho, Swaziland, Mozambique, Angola and the DRC, the remaining countries of the region will be equally affected if the drought were to continue into next year, especially the semi-arid member countries such as Botswana and Namibia.
17. On behalf of my colleagues, the Heads of State and Government of SADC Member States, I wish to record our appreciation for the support rendered by the World Food Programme

(WFP) for the mobilisation and distribution of relief food to about 4.3 million people since the crisis started.

We also thank the other international organisations, countries and NGOs who came to our assistance.

18. Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, despite the unwavering commitment by both SADC Member States and the international community to address the humanitarian crisis, the latest update shows that more still needs to be done. Four months after the launch of the UN/SADC humanitarian appeal, US\$ 256.5 million or 42 percent of the US\$611 million required has been secured, mostly for food aid. The agricultural recovery programme has only received US \$8.7 million or 28 percent of the US \$31.2 million required, while the health sector has received some 14 percent of the US\$48.2 million required.
19. The amounts secured are not insignificant, but viewed in relation to the targets, it is clear that we still have a long way to go. We therefore appeal to our cooperating partners to continue to assist Member States as a matter of urgency, to secure food in order to prevent loss of human lives and avert a humanitarian crisis of catastrophic proportions.
20. Distinguished delegates, I believe it is prudent for SADC to model its Programme of Action in direct response to International Development Targets. Our development agenda must clearly show how we intend to move towards halving the proportion of people living under extreme poverty by 2015.
21. The implementation of national strategies for sustainable development by 2005 in order to reverse the loss of environmental resources by 2015 is also closely related to poverty reduction because it is the poor who suffer the most from the degradation of the environment, although they contribute to it by burning the veldt especially in Botswana.
22. All in all, progress in the rest of the other International Development Targets, such as universal primary education, gender equality, is encouraging and will have a salutary effect on poverty reduction. Unfortunately our targets for reduction in infant and child mortality as well as maternal morbidity and mortality have been reversed by HIV/AIDS. Even access to reproductive health is being constrained by HIV/AIDS which is over-stretching our health services, both health workers and physical facilities.
23. If the SADC development agenda is formulated in such manner, that it is clear what our priorities are, it will be easier for cooperating partners to respond to our needs. There shall also be better alignment between SADC goals and universally accepted goals which should assist in inter-regional comparisons.

24. Madam Chairperson, with regard to the issue of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO), we welcome the assistance of South Africa which has offered to mill about 600 000 tonnes of GMO maize grain donated by the WFP and make it available to countries which accept GMO food. SADC Member States are fully cognisant of the urgent need to pronounce a clear policy on GMO food.