



**Speech delivered by Honourable Princess Mojapelo, representative of South Africa in the SADC Youth Parliament during the 58<sup>th</sup> SADC Parliamentary Forum (SADC-PF), KwaZulu-Natal, Republic of South Africa. The Speech was delivered on behalf of the Southern Africa Youth Forum (SAYoF) on 30 November 2025.**

## **SALUTATIONS**

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- His Excellency, Your Honour, Mr Paul Mashatile, Acting President of the Republic of South Africa, our esteemed Guest of Honour,
- Hon. Randrianasoloniaiko Siteny Thierry, President of the SADC Parliamentary Forum and Speaker of the Parliament of Madagascar,
- Hon. Sylvia Isaks, Vice President of the SADC Parliamentary Forum and Member of the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa,
- Hon. Angela Thokozile Didiza, MP, Speaker of the National Assembly of the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa and Host Speaker of this 58th Plenary Assembly,
- Hon. Refilwe Mtsweni-Tsipane, MP, Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces of the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa and Host Speaker of this 58th Plenary Assembly in absentia,
- Hon. Azarel Jolida Ernesta, Speaker of the National Assembly of Seychelles and Host of the 59th Plenary Assembly,
- Distinguished Speakers of SADC National Parliaments and Heads of Delegations,
- Mr Thulasizwe Ntuli, Premier of KwaZulu-Natal,
- Members of the National Assembly and Members of the National Council of Provinces
- Speakers of the South African Legislative Sector
- Hon. Nontembeko Boyce, MPL, Speaker of the KwaZulu-Natal Legislature,
- Councillor Cyril Xaba, Executive Mayor of the eThekweni Municipality.
- Her Excellency Ms Boemo Sekgoma, Secretary General of the SADC Parliamentary Forum,



- Senator Dr Linda Lorraine Nxumalo, Interim Chairperson of the Regional Women's Parliamentary Caucus and the National Women's Parliamentary Caucus of Eswatini,
- Honourable Members of Parliament from SADC National Parliaments.
- Ms Princess N. Mojapelo, Representative of the Southern Africa Youth Parliament & SAYoF
- Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
- Delegates and Observers,
- Ladies and Gentlemen.

### **Honourable Members, Distinguished Delegates,**

It is an immense honour to stand before this esteemed Assembly once again, on behalf of the vibrant, resilient, and unyielding young people of the SADC region. I rise here representing the Southern Africa Youth Parliament (SAYP), a youth-led, youth-driven platform committed to amplifying young voices and shaping the policies that define our future. Hosted proudly by the Southern Africa Youth Forum (SAYoF), we remain the regional engine of youth mobilization, democratic engagement, and innovation.

And I say “once again” deliberately because since the 56th Plenary Assembly in Livingstone, Zambia, young people have been given the rare, profound privilege of addressing the highest decision-making body of the SADC PF twice every year. Not as spectators. Not as ornaments. But as partners. Contributors. Leaders in our own right.

This is not symbolism. This is substance.

The SADC PF stands today as one of the most youth-inclusive institutions in our region. Here, young people are invited not only to speak, but to help shape the direction of this Forum—through Standing Committee engagements, high-level dialogues, and core programmes. We thank the leadership of this Forum for its courage and foresight. Through initiatives such as the Mentorship Programme, young people are being prepared—intentionally, to step into leadership with clarity, conviction, and competence.

### **Guest of Honour and Distinguished Delegates,**



A historic milestone in this journey was the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between SAYoF and the SADC PF at the 57<sup>th</sup> Plenary Assembly in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe. That agreement did not merely formalize a partnership. It cemented a shared vision: youth political and economic empowerment, digital inclusion, climate governance, and gender equality. These priorities speak directly to the realities and aspirations of our generation.

But progress must be matched with truth. And the truth is this: young people across the SADC region continue to face urgent, deeply interconnected challenges that demand decisive action.

Socio-economic exclusion and unemployment remain some of the most painful hurdles. We are the most educated, most connected generation Africa has ever produced - yet millions of capable, ambitious young people remain locked out of opportunity. With over 60% of our population under 35, this is not just an economic concern. It is a crisis of dignity. A crisis of hope.

When young people cannot turn their skills into livelihoods, frustration rises, trust erodes, and an entire generation is put at risk. Addressing youth unemployment requires more than job creation: it requires restoring confidence, nurturing aspirations, and building inclusive economies where young people can thrive.

Peace and security weigh heavily on us as well. From northern Mozambique to the eastern DRC, young people are too often the first to feel the shockwaves of violence. Yet, in these very places, youth are stepping forward, risking their lives in community peacebuilding, mediation, and grassroots stabilization. In Tanzania and Madagascar, youth-led protests reflect growing impatience with exclusion, inequality, and governance gaps.

We are not a silent generation. We are a generation of action. But to sustain our work, youth peacebuilders do not only need encouragement -they need recognition, protection, and real investment.

Human security remains fragile. Poverty, gender-based violence, and limited access to healthcare (especially sexual and reproductive health) continue to strip young people of their rights and their potential.

And above all, climate change stands as the defining crisis of our lifetime. Its impact is not theoretical. It is lived. Daily. More than 240 million young Africans already endure multiple



climate shocks. In our region, food insecurity, water shortages, and disrupted education are not distant possibilities: they are pressing realities.

Yet even in this crisis, young people are leading. From reforesting landscapes to innovating with digital climate tools, from Mauritius to Malawi, from Seychelles to Zimbabwe, youth across SADC are demonstrating courage, creativity, and resilience.

In 2022, over 400 young people gathered in Johannesburg at the 4th SADC Youth Forum - where the idea of the SADC Youth Climate Change Envoy was conceived. Today, that idea is a living force. The Envoy has launched the Youth Negotiator Programme, convened the first Conference of Youth (COY) ahead of COP, and carried the voices of SADC youth to global platforms, including Africa Climate Week in Nairobi.

This is why we welcome the thoughtful and urgent theme of this 58th Plenary Assembly. Because climate change is neither gender-neutral nor generation-blind. It hits women and young people hardest, but we remain the champions of innovation and adaptation.

### **Guest of Honour and Distinguished Delegates.**

This Assembly has already approved the establishment of the SADC PF Youth Caucus. We eagerly anticipate its full implementation because it will strengthen youth coordination, expand legislative contributions, and establish a permanent home for the Southern Africa Youth Parliament within this Forum.

As I conclude, allow me to reaffirm our central conviction: we look to our parliaments for bold, accountable, transformative leadership that prepares our region not for the world we once knew, but for the world we are entering.

In the powerful words of Oliver Reginald Tambo: “A country, a movement, a person that does not value its youth and children does not deserve its future.” and as the late Nelson Mandela reminds us that “It is in your hands to create a better world for all who live in it.”

The SADC PF has shown this commitment. The challenge before us is to sustain it. Deepen it. Institutionalize it.



As the youth of Southern Africa, we stand before you with one unwavering message:

We are not leaders in waiting.

We are leaders in motion -

Ready to contribute.

Eager to lead.

Determined to shape a future defined by shared purpose, dignity, and opportunity for all.

And as we rise into that future, we carry a principle that has guided youth movements across generations:

Nothing for us, without us.

Thank you.