



**SPEECH BY MINISTER THEMBI SIMELANE, MP,  
DURING THE OCCASION OF THE SYMPOSIUM OF THE 58TH SADC  
PARLIAMENTARY FORUM PLENARY ASSEMBLY**

**THEME: “THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE SADC REGION AND THE  
ROLE OF PARLIAMENTS IN CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION AND  
ADAPTATION.”**

**HELD AT DURBAN, KWA ZULU- NATAL**

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Honourable Speaker,  
Honourable Members of Parliament from across the SADC region,  
Fellow Cabinet Members  
Esteemed partners  
Distinguished guests  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning,

It is my greatest honour to address this Symposium of the 58th SADC Parliamentary Forum Plenary Assembly under a theme that could not be more urgent, more relevant, timely or more defining for our collective future.

Honourable members, we meet at a time when our region is experiencing climate impacts of unprecedented scale. Climate change is no longer a distant environmental concern. It is a developmental crisis. It is a human settlements crisis. It is a socio-economic and governance crisis, and across the Southern African Development Community, it is increasingly becoming a human security crisis.

Recent years have shown us that storms are becoming more violent, droughts more severe, floods more destructive, and heatwaves more deadly. We are gathered here in Durban today, which have seen communities repeatedly displaced, homes swept away, and public infrastructure damaged as a result of the devastating effects of climate change.

Honourable Speaker, not far from where we have gathered, in the past few days, the people of Umshwathi Local Municipality were inordinately impacted and displaced by the floods.

We bear witness to how climate change is threatening development gains, deepening historical inequalities and undermining the right to adequate housing, which is a constitutional guarantee in South Africa and an aspiration shared by all our countries. As we have seen devastating climate events do not follow national borders and what we have experienced here in Durban and along the Eastern Seaboard of South Africa has also affected multiple countries simultaneously. In the same way that we are all affected no single country therefore can address this challenge alone. This gathering therefore, comes at a critical time, and is necessary in offering us an opportunity to establish

connected regional, national and local solutions to one of the biggest threats to our development.

Within South Africa, our Climate Change Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (RVA) confirms that the most affected groups by climate disaster are: rural communities who already face poverty and limited access to services; peri-urban and informal settlement dwellers located in floodplains, steep slopes, wetlands, and fire-prone areas; and women, youth, and children who bear the brunt of inadequate livelihoods, exposure, and socio-economic stress.

Climate change is not gender neutral. It magnifies the structural inequalities that women and girls already face. Women are disproportionately exposed, disproportionately impacted, and disproportionately responsible for absorbing the shocks. In our communities' women carry the burden of concern and caring for the sick when disasters strike, it is women who must rebuild households with fewer resources and less formal support. And yet, women despite being at the frontlines of climate impacts remain at the margins of climate decision-making. That must change.

Equally, young people are growing up in a world shaped by climate uncertainty. They inherit the consequences of decisions they did not make. But we also know that it is our youth, who are Africa's greatest demographic asset.

They are the most powerful drivers of innovation, resilience, and adaptation; their creativity, energy, and digital fluency make them essential partners in building climate-resilient communities.

Honourable members, what does this mean for the critical role Parliaments must play in shaping a climate-resilient and just transition for Southern Africa?

It means that people, most impacted by climate change must be at the centre of the decisions that we make as law makers.

As we confront the escalating climate crisis, we are also called upon to realise the vision articulated in the African Union's Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want—a prosperous, peaceful, united, and resilient continent built on inclusive growth, sustainable development, and the empowerment of women and youth.

The interlinked climate risks affecting our human settlements, follow a chain of events that: when infrastructure fails, ecosystems collapse. When livelihoods decline, informal settlements expand. When governance is weak, communities are unable to adapt. And when finance does not reach those who need it most, poverty and climate impacts reinforce one another. This is why climate change is not simply an environmental challenge. It is a systemic challenge one that requires systemic solutions.

In response, South Africa has developed a Climate Change Response Strategy and Implementation Plan for Human Settlements, which guides how we will build resilience between now and 2030.

Ladies and Gentlemen, allow me to share three strategic pillars which we believe are relevant for the entire SADC region:

Pillar 1: Settle people in safe places and preserve the ecosystems that protect them.

We must avoid placing communities in flood-prone land, unstable slopes, wetlands, coastal zones prone to storm surge, and heat-stressed areas. This is the first and most fundamental line of defence against climate hazards.

Pillar 2: Address vulnerable settlements already in unsafe places.

The reality is that millions of people already live in hazardous locations. For these communities, we must:

- upgrade informal settlements in-situ where safe

- improve essential services such as water, sanitation, and electricity
- invest in nature-based solutions—wetlands, urban greening, vegetated buffers

As South Africa we affirm that no community should remain invisible to policy simply because they are poor.

Pillar 3: Establish climate-resilient infrastructure norms, standards and settlement typologies.

Our infrastructure must withstand new climate realities. These shifts will reduce future losses, enhance liveability, and create safer communities. Critically, we must invest in Innovative Building Technologies (IBTs) as the human settlements' infrastructure of the future, which is reliable, resilient and durable to mitigate climate change.

Honourable Members, Climate resilience is not exclusively a technocratic exercise. It is a community-driven process. We must build a region where communities do not only receive climate information but shape it; where they do not only participate in planning but lead it; and do not only face climate risks but help define the solutions. Disasters move across borders, so information must too.

A regional integration approach allows: Real-time data sharing; Predictive modelling across entire climatic zones; Coordinated evacuation efforts; Early warning alerts that cover multiple countries; and Joint disaster-response teams. This saves lives and reduces damage.

Parliaments across SADC play a central role in building climate-resilient human settlements. As Parliaments we shape the laws, budgets, oversight mechanisms

and standards that determine whether our region is prepared or unprepared for the future.

Your leadership is needed to:

Ensure that land-use planning legislation integrates climate risk; Setting norms and standards for resilient infrastructure; Aligning human settlements laws with the Climate Change Bill and our regional frameworks

Exercising oversight, that ensuring expenditure on housing, infrastructure and disaster risk management aligns with climate risk and requiring early-warning systems and municipal preparedness. Honourable members your instance is need to ensure that that government provides strategic direction and leadership in supporting the mobilisation of adequate climate finance for vulnerable communities and unlocking blended finance and public-private partnerships

Honourable members, we are mid-way in what is a decisive decade. As we confront the escalating climate crisis, we are also called upon not only to realise the Sustainable Development Goals but to do so in tandem with the vision articulated in the African Union's Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want—a prosperous, peaceful, united, and resilient continent built on inclusive growth, sustainable development, and the empowerment of women and youth.

The question before us is simple: Will we build a region that waits for disasters to strike, or a region that acts before disaster becomes inevitable?

The future we want is within our reach. A future where:

- Cities and towns are resilient, safe, and inclusive
- Ecosystems are protected and provide life-saving services
- Women and youth lead resilience initiatives
- Infrastructure is strong, smart, and climate-ready
- Communities live in dignity, not in danger

- Parliaments champion a just transition for all

In conclusion Honourable Members of the Southern Africa Development Community

As an outcome of this Symposium of the 58<sup>th</sup> SADC Parliamentary Forum, let us embrace this moment not as a threat, but as an opportunity to reshape our communities, to strengthen our democracies, and to build a region that thrives in the face of climate change.

I thank you for the opportunity to address this Assembly and look forward to working together as Parliamentarians, governments, partners, and communities in building the climate-resilient future our people deserve.

I thank you.