

SADC PARLIAMENTARY FORUM

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STATEMENT FROM THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE SADC-PF ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF DEMOCRACY 15TH SEPTEMBER 2024

Dear representatives of Member Parliaments, Civil Society Organisations and other partners,

It is with immense pleasure that I release this Statement on the occasion of the International Day of Democracy, which stands as a testament of the Forum's unyielding objective to make parliamentary democracy thrive in the SADC region.

In this respect, the Forum associates itself with the UN theme for this year that focuses on Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a tool for good governance bearing in mind the advantages of leveraging on AI to save time and promote productivity and efficiency, whilst at the same time recognizing that AI must have its restrictive limits. For instance, this year, more than 50 countries representing more than half of the global population entitled to vote are involved in election processes, and we recognize the gravity of AI's interference in campaigning where deepfakes and other AI alterations can mislead public opinion. In a world where electronic information is transmitted instantly through smartphones and computer devices, AI can be a friend but can also become a hostile enemy to democratic processes, if left unchecked. Furthermore, cyberterrorism in modern times is known to be dependent on AI to perpetrate crime at various levels, including to interfere in pre-election polls and campaigns.

From the Forum's perspective, democracy refers to the reflection of the will of the people through elected representatives chosen to express this will within the domains of the institution of Parliament. All efforts must be made to ensure that the will of citizens in a stable democracy remains as informed as possible with AI playing the right part to disseminate truth and dispel untruths and fabrications. Whilst the digital transformation of the SADC region is now blossoming, the Forum encourages all stakeholders to brainstorm on the appropriate parameters for AI and interact with Parliament for legislation to guide the effectiveness of AI in democratic processes.

In this respect, the Forum encourages partners to rally to the noble cause of consolidating democracy through the appropriate use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), AI and internet protocols, and to profusely engage with Parliament to ensure state accountability and redress.

Yours sincerely,

Ms. Boemo SEKGOMA
SECRETARY GENERAL