



Electoral Commission of Namibia

WELCOME REMARKS BY
HON JUSTICE BARNABAS NYAMADZABO, ECF-SADC PRESIDENT AND
CHAIRPERSON OF THE INDEPENDENT ELECTORAL COMMISSION
(IEC) OF BOTSWANA
AT THE 24TH Annual General Conference of the Electoral
Commissions Forum of SADC Countries, Swakopmund Hotel &
Entertainment Centre , Namibia , 25th October 2022

Programme Director

Honourable Minister of Urban and Rural Development Mr Erastus Uutoni

Hon Neville Andre – Governor of Erongo Region

Our host the Electoral Commission of Namibia under the leadership of Chairperson Ms Elsie Nghikembua

Honourable Vice Chairperson of the Executive Committee of the Electoral Commissions Forum of SADC Countries, Hon Justice Priscilla Chigumba

Chairpersons, Commissioners, CEOs and Senior Representatives of the Electoral Commissions of SADC.

The Executive Secretary and esteemed team at ECF-SADC Secretariat

Esteemed partners – International IDEA and European Centre for Electoral Support

Our distinguished International organizations and guests here present

Our distinguished resource persons

Leaders and representatives of Political parties

Members of Civil Society Organizations

Members of the Media

Distinguished Guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen.

1. Allow me to extend a warm word of welcome to you Honorable Minister Uutoni. I wish to express our gratitude to you for having found time in your busy schedule to attend and officially open the 24th Annual General Conference of the Electoral Commissions Forum of the Southern African Development Countries. We are extremely honored by your presence and the important role that parliament plays in strengthening democracy.
2. We also wish to extend our sincere gratitude to the Government and People of the Republic of Namibia for agreeing to host this 24th Annual General Conference. A special word of gratitude goes to our host, the Electoral Commission of Namibia for their hospitality and excellent facilities that they have put at our disposal since our arrival in this beautiful Swakopmund town.
3. Let me also extend a hearty welcome to all the delegates who made time to attend this important conference. A special welcome goes to the new Chairpersons, Commissioners and CEOs from a number of member commissions who are attending the Annual General Conference for the first time. I must declare that I am one of the new Chairpersons, having joined the Independent Electoral Commission of Botswana on 1st September 2022.
4. Let me take this opportunity to acknowledge the member Commissions present here today. Honourable Minister, we have Chairpersons and representatives from the following Commissions: **(May I humbly request that they stand when their respective Commissions are called)**

the National Electoral Commission (CNE) of Angola,(arrive later today)
the Independent Electoral Commission of Botswana,
the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) of the Democratic Republic of Congo,
the Independent Electoral Commission of Lesotho,
the Malawi Electoral Commission,
the Electoral Commission of Mauritius, (not present)
the National Electoral Commission (CNE) of Mozambique,
the Electoral Commission of Namibia,
the National Electoral Commission (NEC) of Tanzania
the Electoral Commission of Seychelles,
the Independent Electoral Commission of South Africa,
the Elections and Boundaries Commission of eSwatini,
the Electoral Commission of Zambia,
the Zanzibar Electoral Commission, and
Zimbabwe Electoral Commission.

5. The theme chosen for this conference is: *Stakeholder Engagement and Accountability to promote public trust in Electoral Processes in the SADC Region*. This theme will not only help us share experiences on the contemporary challenges that face our institutions in developing democracies but will also assist us in sharing best practices to deal with these challenges. Without dwelling into the Seminar deliberations taking place later in this room, allow me to indicate that in contemporary times, Election Management Bodies (EMBs) in the SADC region face a number of challenges, one of which is the challenge of having to manage electoral stakeholder influence on electoral processes, including challenges occasioned by electoral stakeholders and having to manage relationships

with stakeholders. A number of cross cutting factors come into play as EMBs strive to address these challenges; these include an increasingly informed and vibrant electoral stakeholders, diverse interests and responsibilities of stakeholders. In addition, EMBs have to ensure electoral processes are participatory and inclusive.

6. Honorable Minister, this Forum has been in existence for 24 years. During this period, membership of this Forum has enabled us to learn from one another thereby strengthening individual member Commission's capacity in dealing with crucial election matters. This includes the holding of regular seminars on pertinent election topics such as:

- the independence and impartiality of Electoral Commissions,
- challenges facing Election Management Bodies,
- Voter registration and management of voters rolls,
- Use of Information technologies in elections,
- conducting inclusive elections,
- building relationships with electoral stakeholders including political parties, civil society organizations, the media and other stakeholders,
- encouraging development of electoral laws that adhere to regionally and internationally accepted principles of election management,
- development of guidelines for alternative dispute resolution mechanisms,
- establishment of relations with other organizations with similar objectives, and
- Cooperation with government and other state institutions.

7. The sharing of best practices contributes to our ability to deliver elections that are credible and transparent thereby creating an environment conducive to peace and stability in our respective countries.
8. In addition to the above activities, we regularly observe one another's elections as part of our monitoring and evaluation process. The purpose of observing each other's elections is not informed by a desire to prejudge one another but by the need to genuinely work towards improving our election management practices. Thus, for us the priority is not to rush towards declaring elections free or fair whenever they are held, but rather to look at how our election related challenges may be addressed systematically. I can confirm that this year, this forum recently deployed an observer mission to the Republic of Angola and the Kingdom of Lesotho, and the rationale is to strive to assist Member Commissions to identify areas needing improvement in election administration and management, and this also serves as an opportunity for peer learning.
9. At this point in time I wish to acknowledge the European Centre for Electoral Assistance (ECES) and International IDEA for making the holding of this Seminar possible. Member commissions will recall that the relationship between ECF-SADC and these esteemed organizations has been cherished over the years and shall continue to be in the spirit of strengthening democratic consolidation in the SADC region. The ECF-SADC appreciates their commitment to its business.
10. Ladies and Gentlemen, I would also like to extend my gratitude to all the facilitators and resource persons and the Rapporteur who will be guiding our deliberations on the theme of the Seminar later today. We

are very grateful that you heeded our invitation. Allow me to specifically acknowledge the speakers including the keynote address by the Honorable Minister , SADC Parliamentary Forum, EISA and IFES.

11. Programme Director, allow me to acknowledge and appreciate the presence of electoral stakeholders from the host country - Namibia, representatives of political leaders, NGOs and Civil Society Organizations. We are grateful that you availed yourselves to join us in the seminar platform. This is testimony of your keenness to promote such platforms which contribute to securing conducive electoral environment and compliment the efforts of Electoral Management Bodies in SADC Region to conduct credible elections.
12. Honorable Speaker, in the last twenty-four (24) years, the Forum has consistently held seminars alongside its Annual General Conferences on specific thematic issues on democracy and elections. The themes of each of the seminars have over the years been carefully selected to examine electoral and democracy challenges and to draw lessons from those. In addition, the themes serve to explore options for the role of the ECF-SADC in promoting sustainable democratic governance in the SADC region. It is my belief that this 24th Annual General Conference will go a long way in positioning our individual members of the Forum to cope with the emerging challenges of conducting modern day elections.
13. Allow me to share that the ECF-SADC remains one of the highly recognized EMB Network in the SADC region. However resource mobilization has become a big challenge that limits its emergence as one of the regional initiatives to advance and promote adherence to

electoral integrity norms, particularly to address emerging and long-term threats to EMBs and democratic elections.

14. Programme Director, Ladies and Gentlemen it is now my singular honour and privilege to invite the Honourable Minister of Urban and Rural Development Mr Erastus Uutoni , to deliver a Key Note Address and to officially open the 24th Annual General Conference of the Electoral Commissions Forum of the SADC Countries.

I THANK YOU.