STATEMENT
BY

AMBASSADOR JEREMIAH N. MAMABOLO
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA
TO THE UNITED NATIONS

AT

THE THIRD COMMITTEE ON
ON AGENDA ITEM 67: ELIMINATION OF RACISM,
RACIAL DISCRIMINATION, XENOPHOBIA AND
RELATED INTOLERANCE

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Chairperson,

I am privileged to address this Committee on behalf of the following Member States of the Southern African Development Community (SADC): Angola, Botswana, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, Seychelles, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe and my own country, South Africa. SADC Member States align themselves with the statement by the delegation of Fiji on behalf of the G-77 and China.

We thank the Secretary-General for his reports under this agenda item.

Chairperson,

SADC Member States acknowledge the inextricable link between the struggle for emancipation from the shackles of colonialism, apartheid and slavery to the fight to eliminate the emergence and rise of contemporary forms and manifestations of racism globally.

Undoubtedly, the 2001 World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (WCAR) and the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (DDPA) marked a seminal and watershed moment in history by galvanizing States in joining a global commitment towards the combating of the evil scourge of racism at the global level. Of particular importance in this regard, was the extension of maximum protection and adequate remedies to the victims of these abuses. Equally significant was the declaration of slavery, the slave trade and the transatlantic slave trade as crimes against humanity and that colonialism constituted one of the major sources of historical racism and racial discrimination.

Despite some progress made in combating the scourge of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, almost thirteen years since the WCAR and the adoption of the DDPA, SADC Member States lament the slow and uneven progress by States in implementing in full the DDPA. In particular, much more needs to be done in addressing contemporary manifestations of racism. In this regard, we note with concern the indications in the most recent report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on this issue, the stark reality that contemporary forms and manifestations of racism continue to rise in all parts and regions of the world. SADC Member States therefore encourage all States to demonstrate their commitment to the elimination
of racism in all its forms and manifestations, through the full and effective implementation of the DDPA.

Chairperson,

SADC Member States strong reaffirm the principle of non-discrimination, thereby condemning all ideologies based on racial superiority and intolerance, underscoring also that the prohibition of the dissemination of all ideas based upon racial superiority and hatred is compatible with the exercise of the right to freedom of opinion and expression. It is our view that the exercise of this right has limits under international human rights law as provided for in Article 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICPD) and elaborated in General Recommendation 15 of the Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD).

It is our firm belief that the application of the principle of non-discrimination remains the cornerstone in the practical enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms. As such, we view the World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (WCAR) as one of the greatest international achievements in the area of non-discrimination and would encourage the Office of the High Commissioner to continue to support this key thematic issue, particularly in terms of its objectives including among others, the resuscitation of the work of the Independent Eminent Experts and the Decade on People of African Descent.

We therefore strongly welcome the recently adopted Human Rights Council resolution 24/26 entitled “From rhetoric to reality: a global call for concrete action against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance”, towards giving a much needed impetus for the resuscitation of the work of the Independent Eminent Experts appointed by the United Nations Secretary-General on 16 June 2003. Indeed, the Independent Eminent Experts must be capacitated to perform their important role of mobilising political will at the highest political levels for the full and effective implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action.

Chairperson,

SADC Member States welcome the aim of the resolution towards enhancing momentum for the proclamation by the United Nations General Assembly of the International Decade for People of African Descent, and within this context, the adoption of the draft Programme of
Action elaborated by the Working Group of Experts on People of African descent as mandated by General Assembly resolution 66/144 of 19 December 2011. In this regard, it will be recalled that the Human Rights Council transmitted the draft Programme of Action to the General Assembly through its resolution 21/33 for consideration and adoption.

Consequently, we look forward to the proclamation of the International Decade of People of African Descent during the 68th Session of the United Nations General Assembly as a platform for the elaboration of a programme of action and activities for the Decade. In this regard, we appreciate the valuable contributions made by the Working Group of Experts on the People of African Descent towards the achievement of this important objective.

Chairperson,

People of African Descent in the Diaspora who continue to live in conditions of extreme poverty, exacerbated by the current economic and financial crisis have survived the most brutal and appalling tragedies of slavery and the slave trade, including the transatlantic slave trade.

SADC Member States trust that the International Decade for People of African Descent will focus attention on the plight of the victims of these historical injustices, and contribute to the realisation of all their human rights and fundamental freedoms, through initiatives that will be undertaken by States and various stakeholders in the framework of the International Decade.

We furthermore, welcome recent efforts on the elaboration of complementary standards to strengthen and update international instruments on racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance in support of the full and effective implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action.

In this regard, SADC Member States would urge States to cooperate in the context of the Ad Hoc Committee on Complementary Standards towards the acceleration and fulfilment of its mandate.

Chairperson,

The Southern African region has itself been subjected to legalised and institutionalised racism and racial discrimination during the colonial era. The experiences and terrible consequences of apartheid in South Africa
are also well documented. SADC Member States have therefore laid a solid foundation for the combating of these abuses through the enactment of anti-discriminatory legislation and the domestication of relevant international and regional instruments, in particular the International Covenant on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

In this regard, while noting the high number of ratifications of the ICERD, SADC Member States would urge States to refrain from entering reservations on some of the key provisions of the Convention, and to encourage those who have entered reservations to withdraw these in the spirit and letter of the Convention.

Chairperson,

The defeat of apartheid represents a powerful symbol of the victory of mankind over inhumanity, underscoring the indomitability of the human spirit and its ability to overcome unimaginable adversity and hardship confronted by indescribable odds. As such, we must all draw on the lessons learnt from this tragic chapter of human history, together with others constituting crimes against humanity to collectively address the immense challenge facing the global community in combating contemporary and modern forms of slavery in its various forms and manifestations.

With the necessary political will by States and the broader international community, supported by the United Nations system, SADC Member States believe that the international community can substantively advance progress towards the elimination of contemporary forms of racism in all its forms and manifestations.

I thank you.