

All set for the SADC PF 38th Plenary Assembly Session

Special Correspondent

Swakopmund, Namibia – Speakers of National Parliaments and their delegations from the SADC Region began arriving in Swakopmund, one of Namibia’s tourism hotspots, on Tuesday to attend the 38th Plenary Assembly Session of the SADC Parliamentary Forum.

The Plenary Assembly is the highest decision making body of the 14-member SADC PF, the deliberative regional organization that is striving to transform into a SADC Regional Parliament.

Speaking on behalf of the SADC PF Secretary General Dr Esau Chiviya, Mr Sheuneni Kurasha, the Programme Manager: Democracy & Governance as well as Parliamentary Business Focal Person at SADC PF, said all was set for the Plenary Assembly Session scheduled to take place from the 16th to the 25th of November, 2015.

“We are prepared. This Plenary is being hosted by the SADC PF Secretariat with support from the Parliament of Namibia. All the arrangements have been put in place. Executive Committee members have started arriving for preparatory meetings ahead of the official opening session and the Plenary Assembly Session,” he said on Tuesday evening.

He revealed that all SADC PF Member States save the United Republic of Tanzania and Seychelles would be represented due to reasons related to elections.

“The United Republic of Tanzania had general elections on the 25th of October and are, therefore, organizing themselves post elections. Seychelles is going to have presidential elections from the 3rd to the 5th of December,” he explained.

In terms of the SADC PF Constitution, each Parliament sends its Speaker and five other delegates. At least 72 Parliamentarians are expected to attend. Each

Parliament also sends support staff. Additionally, the host Parliament can send as many observers as it can.

“We are expecting between 100 and 120 delegates,” Kurasha said.

This Plenary Assembly Session is being held under the theme: ‘From Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Towards a greater Parliamentary Role in the Development agenda.’

The theme is relevant and timely given the fact that on the 25th of September, 2015 the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted a new developmental framework from the MDGs whose end date is 2015. The SDGs outline the developmental framework for the next 15 years up to 2030. One of the things that came out of the review of the MDGs and their implementation was the lack of an institutionalized role for Parliamentarians. Under the SDGs, there is recognition of the important role of National Parliaments in terms of their oversight function, which is important in monitoring and evaluating implementation of SDGs.

Expectations were that this Plenary Assembly Session would give MPs an opportunity to be briefed on the progress and challenges of the MDGs and the focus of the SDGs which have been broadened to include issues related to promotion of just, peaceful and inclusive societies among others.

Turning to the highlights of this Plenary Assembly Session, Kurasha said there would be a symposium where a representative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Namibia office and the Association of European Parliamentarians with Africa (AWEPA) will make presentations on the theme. The SADC Model law on Eradicating Child Marriage and Protecting those Already in Marriage whose development the SADC PF has been spearheading with other stakeholders will be presented to the Plenary Assembly Session for adoption. Plenary deliberations are also expected to touch on climate change.

Also on the agenda are various motions and debates on topical issues including the adoption of the report of the SADC PF Election Observation Mission to Tanzania’s general elections and the need for SADC Member States to invest in alternative energy given the prevailing electricity crisis in parts of the SADC Region. Another motion is expected to call for the development of gender quotas to hasten the

process of achieving gender parity and equity. In 2008 the SADC Region adopted the Protocol on Gender and Development. Prior to that there had been related declarations. While there has been progress in some parts of the SADC Region with respect to gender equity and parity, the motion seeks to influence the region's MPs to consider legislative options in this regard.

In terms of the rules of SADC PF the host Parliament invites the host country's head of state to officially open the Plenary Assembly. Kurasha said the National Assembly of Namibia was yet to say who would officially open the Plenary Assembly.

Ends/.