Building Research Capacity and Innovation Ecosystems for a Sustainable Industrialised SADC Economy: Welcome and Introductory Speech

His Excellency, The President of The Republic of Zimbabwe
Cde Dr Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa

Esteemed Members of the SADC Bloc, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, allow me to welcome you all to the Republic of Zimbabwe for the 7th SADC Summit Public Lecture, which leads up to the 44th Ordinary Summit of SADC Heads of State and Government to be held here in Harare in the next two days. It has become our tradition as the Bloc to deliver a Public Lecture prior to the Ordinary Summit to engage the people of SADC and share with them our successes and our collective vision of the future of the region as an inspiration for deepening our regional integration and economic development. I am deeply honoured to deliver the 7th SADC Summit Public Lecture with the theme, "Building Research Capacity and Innovation Ecosystems for a Sustainable Industrialised SADC Economy*".* The Lecture is a call to action for an industrialised SADC driven by Research, Science, Technology and Innovation, and encapsulated in a new paradigm of education for development.

This SADC Summit comes at a time when the region has experienced major global events: the COVID 19 pandemic, climate change, conflicts, geopolitics of resources, changes of taste and preferences for goods and services, new market demands for technology and innovation, and the emerging new economic world order. Our Bloc has to position itself strategically to convert these global challenging events into economic and business opportunities that lift our people out of poverty and hunger and promote prosperity for the region. As SADC, we still face critical problems of poverty, hunger and environmental degradation which, if not attended to, can weigh heavily on the development efforts of member states and easily aggravate precipitation of health matters, conflicts, and drug and substance abuse by our young people. Our challenge as a region is to establish ourselves as a competitive economic Bloc anchored on the capacity to produce goods and services.

The challenging events that are manifesting in the world create new business and trade opportunities for SADC to be a key player. If we appropriately and sufficiently strengthen our emerging trading bloc, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), COMESA, SADC and ECOWAS, we can develop our own

markets and open routes to trade and marketing opportunities with other global players in Asia, in the Americas and Europe. To harness these new opportunities, SADC should introspect and identify its areas of comparative advantage. This should be viewed in the context of the new world order, as we transcend the series of fast changing paradigms in industrialisation. We should create business and trading niches and assert ourselves as a global player. The next revolution will be powered by new forms of energy, especially lithium and solar. This will create new generations of companies and industries, new forms of value addition, and produce new goods and services.

For all this to happen, we have to have the right development philosophy. I want to posit that our industrialisation lies in transforming our education systems, anchored on Science, Technology and Innovation, to build the research capacity and innovation ecosystems towards our collective vision of industrialisation. As the people of SADC, we have to take each other on a journey to imagine and reimagine an industrialised SADC. We have to ask ourselves: Where do we want to go? What should an industrialised SADC look like in terms of its characteristics, in terms of the goods and services we want to produce, in terms of the mark of wealth and prosperity? These are the questions that should form the basis for challenging our academia, our scientists, our skills training institutions, our industrialists and business community, our development practitioners, and our community traditions to transform and develop systems and models that are fit for purpose. Proposals and recommendations from the recently held SADC Industrialisation Week give us a starting point to put into perspective the trajectory we want to take in moving our industrialisation agenda forward.

As long as the education system in our region is still informed by the colonial architecture, it is not fit for the purpose to drive the industrialisation of SADC. The colonial education system was designed to produce workers rather than innovators and industrialists equipped with skill sets/competencies to produce the goods and services that meet the needs of our people.

As the Government of Zimbabwe, we have taken a bold decision and introduced a completely new education system, the heritage-based Education 5.0 philosophy. We conceptualised the model to connect the elementary, basic and higher education in which lower levels provide feedstocks for the higher and tertiary education institutions. The new curriculum is designed to embrace science, technology and innovation to produce goods and services towards industrialisation. This system appropriates research as fundamental to the advancement of our regional agenda. Science, Technology and Innovation should be placed at the centre, and this is the only way we can leapfrog and accelerate our development to levels of other nations on the continent and beyond. This change in the

education framework has seen the Government of Zimbabwe dedicating a budget for research and development and crafting of policies for isolation and provision of funds to support the emerging innovation ecosystems. We have invested in the establishment of innovation hubs, industrial parks and incubation centres across all our higher education institutions to provide a conducive environment for the development of research and innovation ecosystems and nurturing innovations.

Our heritage-based education has created capacity and innovation ecosystems by connecting academia, industry and commerce, government departments, development partners and communities to create new entrepreneurs, new production systems and new companies and industries for the production of relevant goods and services. In so doing, we have enabled industries and government departments to be powered on knowledge and formulation of policies informed by evidence.

This radical and futuristic transformation of our education system has started to bear fruit. We have seen the emergence of various innovations and patents as new forms of assets — new technologies and start-up companies that are producing relevant goods and services — responding to the dynamic needs of industry, commerce and society. Some of you may have visited one of our key start-up company led by the University of Zimbabwe, the National Transtech Solutions (Pvt.) Ltd, which is locally producing quality vehicle number plates. The company has the capacity to produce 14 000 plates per day, and this is beyond Zimbabwe's requirements. We have the capacity to support the entire SADC region. Chinhoyi University of Technology has established a science-based livestock production system for growing our national herd. Midlands State University has established a start-up company, the National Pathology Research and Diagnostic Centre, which provides health diagnostic services. Bindura University of Science Education has established a plant for the production of wine and juices from our local *masawu* fruit. Other higher and tertiary education institutions are also producing various goods and services for the nation and beyond. This is a Zimbabwean model for industrialisation anchored on the philosophy of *Nyika Inovakwa Nevene Vayo* (Only we can build our nation).

As SADC, we can evaluate, review and restructure this education model to drive the industrialisation of the Bloc. Our region has unique opportunities that position us for success. We have all that is needed for SADC to become an economic powerhouse in the global economic arena. The region has a rich resource base which the world has failed to exhaust, even with 400 years of colonialism; we have our resilient and interconnected people; we have our vast arable land for agriculture; we have our minerals, we have our good climate, we have our heritage and tourism; we have our lithium, a completely new mineral found within SADC,

which can power the new Green Industrialisation Revolution. I believe what is now important for the region is to reorganise itself and harness Science, Technology and Innovation to sustainably unlock value from these diverse resources that we collectively share as a Bloc.

As I conclude, let me say to the people of SADC, we have to repurpose our resource pools and optimise our production through specialisation that is anchored on the right education philosophy. The programming of our new education systems should be aligned to key resources as spatially distributed across the Bloc. We have to self-organise and self-mobilise to push the envelope of our industrialisation, leaving no one and no member state behind. The future of SADC will be driven by knowledge and innovation.

Asante
Merci
Obrigado/Obrigada
Thank you