

Dr Motseki Hlatshwayo's Statement at the Launch of the E€OFISH Programme (virtual), 09 December 2020

- **Honourable Nandcoomar Bodha, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade of the Republic of Mauritius;**
- **Honourable Sudheer Maudhoo - Ministrer of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping of the Republic of Mauritius**
- **His Excellency Mr Vincent Degert, Ambassador of the European Union (EU) to the Republic of Mauritius and the Republic of Seychelles;**
- **His Excellency Prof Vêlayoudom Marimoutou, Secretary General of the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC);**
- **Excellencies of the nine Implementing Partners, COMESA, EAC, IGAD, IOC, LTA, LVFO, SADC, IOTC, SWIOFC and their Representatives;**
- **Dr Soobaschand Sweenarain, E€OFISH Programme Team Leader, and members of IPMU;**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen... All protocol observed;**

GOOD EVENING! BONSOIR!

On behalf of SADC Executive Secretary, Dr. Stergomena L. Tax, I would like to thank the organisers for inviting us to this launch, and for affording us the platform to give remarks as the Chair of the E€OFISH Programme Steering Committee and one of the implementing partners.

Let me also take this opportunity to welcome you all to the Launch of the E€OFISH Programme. It would have been nice to join you in person in the beautiful country of Mauritius, but unfortunately some of us can only join this important event virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This launch is happening during a crucial period when we are observing 16 Days of Activism against Gender Based Violence (GBV), culminating to tomorrow's

commemoration of International Human Rights Day (10 December). We remember one of the great symbols of human rights of our time: Dr Nelson Rolihlanhla Mandela, whose lifelong commitment to human dignity, equality, justice and compassion, will forever remain an inspiration as we continue to build a region of human rights for all. May his soul rest in eternal peace.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Fisheries and aquaculture, like other sectors, rely upon functioning environmental and social systems, and inter-dependencies between those systems mean human beings must be considered when addressing issues of environmental conservation. Our sector has been plagued by various kinds of human rights abuses, and related crimes like human trafficking and others. In addition, Gender Based Violence (GBV) has become a pandemic in our cross-region, and as the fisheries and aquaculture sector players, we should stand together against these atrocities. The cross-regional platform created by the European Union (EU) through E€OFISH programme provides us with an opportunity to stand together and eradicate these challenges as a collective in our respective regions and countries.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is common knowledge that fisheries and aquaculture are of critical importance for the social and economic development, and food and nutrition security of the Eastern Africa, Southern Africa and Indian Ocean (EA-SA-IO) cross-region. The inland and marine coastal fisheries resources of the EA-SA-IO cross-region represent a natural wealth of over 50 billion Euros. It is pleasing to also note that our sector is more gender-sensitive as more women play an important role in the cross-regional fish value chains. There is evidence that women's work, paid and unpaid, is often the single most important poverty-reducing factor in many countries. We have a role to play to ensure that we emancipate more women to play a meaningful and central role in the sector, and protect them against unfair practices and GBV.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Despite opportunities and current growth prospects that the cross-regional fisheries and aquaculture sector provides and has experienced, respectively. However, there are still challenges that need to be addressed. The challenges range from fish diseases, limited technical skills and technologies, and limited funding that continues to affect the growth of aquaculture, to challenges with illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, uncontrolled intra-regional fish trade, degradation of aquatic environments, negative impacts of climate change and limited capacity to effectively manage fish stocks.

Moreover, these challenges have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has triggered a public health and economic calamities in most countries of the cross-region. Although COVID-19 does not affect fish, the fish sector has been subject to indirect impacts of the pandemic through changing consumer demands, market access or logistical problems related to transportation and border restrictions. This is having damaging effects on fishers and fish farmers' livelihoods, as well as on food security and nutrition for populations that rely heavily on fish for animal protein and essential micronutrients. Over and above, the COVID-19 pandemic period has seen increases in GBV and other human rights violations, and more so on-board many fishing vessels.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

E€OFISH programme strives to ensure the sustainable management of fisheries resources by putting in place policies to handle them effectively, by protecting them and by promoting good fishing practices. As we continue to implement this programme, we should also consider the human rights element in our policies and strategies.

Under the current phase of the E€OFISH programme, we as SADC have begun addressing the following two priorities: (1) Introduction of the Trans-boundary Marine Conservation Area in the Western Indian Ocean – where we have upscaled our

activities and efforts to build capacity, advocacy, development of modalities for cooperation collaboration and processes for negotiations amongst affected countries. (2) Sustainable management of small scale fisheries within the inland waters space, where we hope to soon develop a regional platform for sharing lessons learned and best practices on fisheries management, specifically within the Zambezi River Ecosystem. Our goal is to ensure these lessons learnt and best practices are effectively shared throughout the region.

As we continue to build cross-regional synergies through E€OFISH, we should also be mindful of some key sectoral cross-cutting blue economy issues like R&D, capacity building and environmental management. In addition, one of the key areas that brings us together more than before is how as the cross-region strengthen measures to mitigate against effects of COVID-19 pandemic and other disasters like fish diseases outbreaks, drought and floods, against the fisheries and aquaculture sector.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In closing, the ECOFISH programme, within the framework of its 3 result areas, will indeed build the cross-region's capacity for sustainable blue growth, most importantly through the arranged collaboration and partnership with regional organizations responsible for fisheries management and development; and by fully leveraging the decades of experience that exist within the implementing partners.

E€OFISH is OUR STRENGTH, let us take this advantage to effect positive change in the cross-region.

Enjoy the event and the rest of the evening...I Thank You, Merci...