



**STATEMENT BY
HIS EXCELLENCY MATAMELA CYRIL RAMAPHOSA,
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA AND CHAIRPERSON OF SADC,
ON THE OCCASION OF THE SOUTHERN AFRICA LIBERATION DAY,**

23 MARCH 2026

Once again on this day, 23 March 2026, we celebrate the Southern Africa Liberation Day – one of the most significant milestones in our shared journey toward freedom and independence as a regional community. We honour, with deep respect and gratitude, the brave men and women who stood at the forefront of the struggle to liberate the Southern African region. Through their unwavering commitment and resilience, many freedom fighters and ordinary citizens made immense sacrifices in the fight against colonial rule and apartheid, laying the foundation for the peace, dignity, and sovereignty we uphold today.

We also recall, with profound appreciation, the solidarity and support of our international partners – most notably the people and government of Cuba – who deployed their military forces to stand alongside regional liberation movements and independent states. Together, they confronted the South African Defence Force of the apartheid regime in the historic Battle of Cuito Cuanavale in Angola. This decisive confrontation marked a turning point in the struggle for liberation in Southern Africa, contributing significantly to the independence of Namibia in 1990, and paving the way for the first democratic elections in South Africa in 1994.

We continue to draw inspiration for our regional integration and development agenda from the vision and determination of the Founders of SADC. While we mark this seminal moment in our region's history annually, it is far from an empty ritual performed merely to acknowledge a date on the calendar. Rather, it serves as an important opportunity for reflection on where we stand today in relation to our historical struggles that sought to secure for our people the right to determine their own systems of governance, to exercise control over their economies and ultimately to reclaim their dignity and collective destiny.

In addition to commemorating the Southern Africa Liberation Day, we are reminded of the 38th SADC Heads of State and Government Summit held in August 2018 in Windhoek, Republic of Namibia, where the region's Leadership approved the establishment of a regional working group of curriculum experts tasked with determining the requirements for teaching Southern African Liberation History and its integration into the school curricula of SADC Member States. We look forward to the most noble endeavour to take root across our region.

May we continue to demonstrate solidarity and honour our liberation heritage and interconnected communities through meaningful and enduring cooperation, including the naming of heritage sites, museums, monuments, streets, buildings, and other institutions after the fallen heroes and heroines of our liberation struggles. In doing so, we preserve their legacy, inspire future generations, and reaffirm our collective commitment to the values of freedom, unity, and dignity for which they so selflessly stood.

As we navigate the realities of an increasingly unpredictable global environment, I urge all of us, as independent nations and citizens of SADC, to remain vigilant in the face of emerging challenges that may threaten our hard-won independence and the stability of our region. Let us remain focused, united, and steadfast in advancing our common regional agenda, guided by the enduring principles of solidarity, resilience, and collective self-determination.

The liberation we commemorate will remain incomplete as long as some of our fellow Africans continue to yearn for self-determination. We therefore stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, who continue to be denied the fundamental right to determine their own destiny.

As with the SADC Founders and many who fought tirelessly for our liberation, we reaffirm that it is neither the colour of our skin, nor the size of our military arsenals, nor the magnitude of our national budgets that should determine our humanity or the sustainability of the human race as a whole. May dialogue and peace be our most righteous armour to safeguard the freedom we continue to enjoy and work collectively toward a more just and equitable world. Let us ensure that SADC, the cradle of humanity, realises its hopes towards regional and universal integration.

I wish the SADC family a blessed, peaceful and commemorative Liberation Day.

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