



## **STATEMENT FROM THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE SADC-PF ON WORLD AIDS DAY**

**1<sup>ST</sup> DECEMBER 2023**

Dear Colleagues/partners,

It is with immense pleasure that I release this Statement to Member Parliaments and partners on the occasion of World AIDS Day 2023.

Since decades, the Forum has been consistently fighting for parliamentary initiatives and delivery to eradicate HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa. The SADC Model Law on HIV was the first normative legal framework adopted by the Forum in view of assisting Member Parliaments to spearhead effective measures that could contain the HIV pandemic in a region notoriously known as the global epicentre of the virus. After more than 40 years since AIDS was first medically described, Eastern and Southern Africa is still the heaviest impacted region with only 92% of People Living with HIV (PLHIV) who know their status, 83% of people who are on treatment, and 77% who are virally suppressed (UNAIDS data in 2022). The region is thus far from reaching the 95-95-95 targets although progress has been made in the past years in reducing the number of new HIV infections and the number of AIDS-related deaths.

The Forum recognises that in the past years, budgeting for national HIV responses has been seriously hampered due to COVID-19, steeping inflation and the rise in other commodities which weigh heavily on public expenditure. In addition, there has been a hiatus in the strengthening of legal frameworks to prevent HIV/AIDS, with issues such as non-criminalisation of HIV transmission, availability of prophylaxis treatments, access to ARVs, free testing for HIV, or the prevention of mother to child transmissions, being often viewed as favours to PLHIV and other individuals rather than rights. However, in 2023, Governments should not be distracted from core priorities and should set the navigating compass back to the progressive eradication of AIDS as a public health threat by 2030 if the gains so laboriously made are not to be reversed.

In this vein, the Forum fully associates itself with the UN theme for 2023 which is “Let communities lead” that echoes with the Forum-led initiatives to promote participation of communities and constituencies to give their voices to HIV related policies and decisions which affect them. Participatory democracy activated through Parliaments indeed mean that communities are to be engaged through public hearings, awareness campaigns and widespread media outreach in order to allow communities to lead and give first-hand feedback on the issues which most influence the national HIV response. Community-led approaches that are inclusive also ensure that key populations and other marginalised groups are heard prior to policy-makers penning down their key strategies.

Accordingly, the Forum stands side by side with Parliaments and communities to revive the impetus for parliamentary initiatives which serve to put an end to HIV/AIDS through laws, budgets and oversight representations that promote equality of treatment and accountability.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Ms B. Sekgoma', written in a cursive style.

**Ms B. Sekgoma, Secretary General, SADC-PF**