

**Speech by**

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Speaker of the  
Mauritius National Assembly**

**On the occasion of the  
Opening Ceremony of the Second Session 2002  
Bi-Annual Conference of the SADC  
Parliamentary Forum**

**At Sir Harilal Vaghjee Memorial Hall  
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It is a privilege and pleasure for me on behalf of the Parliament and people of Mauritius, to welcome you to the Second bi-annual meeting 2002 of the SADC Parliamentary Forum. I hope, Honourable delegates, are by now, comfortably settled in their hotel room and fresh for this week long meeting. I wish also to welcome and thank the Rt Honourable Prime Minister, for having kindly agreed to open this conference.

Honourable Delegates, as a passing remark, I would like to say a few words about the SADC Parliamentary Forum. In the Preamble of its Constitution, our organization has set itself the target of becoming a Regional Parliamentary structure. And now that it is almost seven years that the Forum exist, I believe that it is high time that we stop and think about the progress we have made towards that aim.

There is no doubt, that we have made considerable strides in strengthening Regional Co-operation in the SADC region. Through the different meetings and seminars organized by the Forum, problems common to the SADC region have been identified and the different standing committees have produced marvelous reports. The Election observation missions of the Forum have also made reports and recommendations, after each mission. But we know that, unless reports are acted upon and implemented, they remain dead letters and are of no use. The point I want to make, Honourable delegates is that the Forum, being an organ of the SADC cannot fulfill its mission properly unless the SADC gives due consideration to the work and role of the Forum. I need hardly say that the SADC Parliamentary Forum is representative of the grass-root level of the community. The mission of SADC and that of the Parliamentary Forum is one and the same. Amongst other things, their common mission is the socio-economic betterment of the life of the people in the region. Honourable delegates, if we are really minded to become a strong Regional Parliamentary Structure, this is the time to address the relational issue between the Forum and the SADC.

We are living in an age where voters want more information and control, greater accountability and transparency from their governments. They want to know what their governments are doing, not only nationally but also internationally. At a time when there is a constant demand to give parliamentary dimensions to every regional and international organization whose decision affect the life of ordinary people, we in the region are fortunate to have our Parliamentary Forum. As Parliamentarians we should continue to act as a check on the executive, in whatever form they appear. At no cost should we allow role to be reversed.

Honourable delegates, during the next few days we will be called upon to discuss a very important and topical subject which has become the major cause of suffering for the people of Africa. Poverty is not a new phenomenon. It is as old as human kind. Governments and International Development Agencies have been groping with the problems for centuries now. In the course of this meeting we will have to reflect on how Parliamentarians can positively contribute to eradicate this scourge.

The efforts of governments and other international agencies have definitely paid dividends, but unfortunately in an uneven manner. Whilst some countries, such as India, China, Japan and Taiwan

have seen their rate of poverty regress to a considerable extent, most countries on the African continent have made little progress. Yet nature has endowed these countries with immense natural and human resources. We have to ask ourselves, why, despite the abundance of resources vast populations in the African continent are poor. Some people say that poverty is rampant in Africa because of poor level of development and economic growth. Others say that poverty hinders economic growth. Yet others say that poverty is the direct consequence of military dictatorship, war, civil unrest, corruption, political instability, and bad governance. This is definitely a vicious circle.

Honourable delegates, as representative of our constituents we have the primary responsibility of ensuring their well-being. It is important that we parliamentarians are fully involved in addressing the issues in their globality and use our good offices at various level be it socially, politically and economically, to alleviate the burden of the people whom we represent. We have the duty and ought to have the capacity to do so. In the present day's state of advancement and technology, it is unacceptable that vast population remain poor and starve to death.

If we, in the developing countries are to shape our own destiny, and participate fully in shaping the future of the world we have to have an effective voice and this can be possible only if we Parliamentarians work together in the areas of vital concern to all of us. We need our Parliamentarians to be men and women of vision, influenced by the power of knowledge, organization and management in order to lend support to the institutions engaged in the development and progress of this planet. Parliamentarians are the spokespersons of the people whom they represent and ought to know how best to serve their interests. They have been elected precisely for that, and nothing else. They ought to help in working out necessary policies to hasten social, cultural, economic and political progress. Together we can become stronger.

The situation on the continent is however not so desperate. Already the new partnership for African development (NEPAD) and the African Union (AU) have undertaken the difficult, but not impossible mission of shaping the destiny of Africa. The creation of the African Union is known for its willingness to take up the challenge of building unity, peace and stability and providing sustainable development on the African continent. This has to be followed by the promotion and advancement of democracy, human rights and sound economic policies across the continent by setting high standards of economic and political governance which are indispensable preconditions for the fight against poverty. More importantly the creation of the Pan-African Parliament in the context of the African Unions will provide an additional forum to parliamentarians, to participate and contribute to the development of Africa and in improving the life of its people.

Honourable delegates, you really have a heavy schedule for this meeting but I hope this will not prevent you to find some time to enjoy the hospitality of our people and the beauty of our island. Before I end I wish you all fruitful deliberation and Bon Courage.