**Southern Africa Climate Change Youth Envoy Remarks at the Environment and Climate Change Conference, Harare Zimbabwe #ECC2022 20 October 2022**

Representatives of the Zimbabwe Government

The Regional Coordinator for SAYoF

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Professor Gideon Zhou representing Professor Paul Mapfumo the Vice Chancellor University of Zimbabwe.

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Her Excellency Ambassador of Egypt Salwa Mowafi

Her Excellency Ambassador of Canada Christina Buchani

UNESCO Representative,

Local, Regional and International Organisations

Esteemed Speakers, Participants, Media, and Facilitators

Director of Ceremonies

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great honour and pleasure to address you at this Environment and Climate Change Conference in my capacity as Climate Youth Envoy for Southern Africa. Today we have gathered as stakeholders from various sectors of society to deliberate on some of the biggest challenges facing the future of our region, Africa and the world. Earlier this year young people and stakeholders gathered in Johannesburg South Africa during the 4th SADC Youth Forum recommending concrete steps to tackle climate change in our region. The Forum further noted the need to contextualise climate change at national level, by ensuring that all stakeholders, including governments, private sector, CSOs, traditional and religious institutions, communities, academic institutions, young people, women among other proffer sustainable and indigenous solutions to combat climate change. While climate change is already affecting the lives of ordinary citizens in SADC, the average citizen remains excluded from climate action discourses and initiatives.

The COP-27 that will take place on African soil in Egypt later this year provides the region with a unique opportunity to plan, reflect, strategies and take sustainable action. Its no longer the time for talking, but time to act. The past decade has shown us how devastating climate change can be, with droughts, cyclones, high temperatures, floods, and veld fires raging across the nations of SADC. Tackling climate change requires concerted effort and should be everyone’s responsibility. It is also of paramount importance to note that, youth inclusion in Climate resilience will assist to anticipate, prepare for, and respond to hazardous events, trends, or disturbances related to climate. The Southern African Development Community (SADC) has a growing, young population. Almost three-quarters of the 274 million people living in the region are below 35 years of age. However young people must be empowered to play a leading role in the fight, not only because youth constitute the largest demographic in the population, but also because youth are the custodians and heirs of the future. It has been proven time and time again that if young people are empowered in climate action and justice, then the climate movement will be solid, warm, real, influential, and powerful.

As young people we will one day need to lead the world in the face of everchanging disasters and climate instability. So, we are taking action now, to ensure that the next generation will have hope and a liveable future. The generations before us carried their mandate, by ensuring that Southern Africa was liberated from foreign rule, colonialism and Apartheid. Now is the time for a new generation to pick up the mantle of a new mandate, one that strives for sustainability and climate justice.

Ladies and gentlemen, to achieve this we must address the root causes of climate change and recognise that this phenomenon is cause is human activity. We must also take note of the unjust burden that Africa bears in the fight against climate change. Even though Africa contributes the smallest percentage of carbon emissions, the region is the most vulnerable to the effects of climate disasters. This is also true in terms of the economic impact that climate change has on vital sectors that SADC economies rely on, including agricultural production. The current generation must take it upon itself, to draw attention to this disparity and advocate for an equitable international approach to climate justice. If we do not take active action, the coming generation will ask us, what have we done, and where were we when the trees where disappearing, the rivers and seas dying, the soil was eroding, industries uncontrollably polluting our very earth, and business making profits at the expense of human life.

We don’t only require a change of approach, but also the need for a coherent approach to deal with climate change. We don’t only require changing of mind sets, but also to set our minds towards climate adaptability, resilience, and mitigation. A combined responsibility is the pinnacle to a sustainable change, our mother earth is dying, which means you and me are also dying. My call for action is centred around a new sense of responsibility, climate smart systems, a call to use pan-African approaches to solve our climate challenges.

This conference must feed to our broader regional agenda, apart from shaping national policies and strategies. Africa must unite and act, but coming together and agreeing that climate change is an urgent matter, we have taken the first step. Today, let’s look at each other in the eyes, openly asking whether we have done enough. This is a tragedy that requires more than individual effort, but a strength in numbers. Together we can resolve it!