



SANTLDDR

Southern Africa Network of Traditional
Leaders in Drug Demand Reduction

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Opening Speech by the SANTLDDR Chairperson

Technical Experts Meeting on the Development of the AU Plan of Action on Drug Control and Crime Prevention (2026–2030)
Maputo, Mozambique

**Your Excellencies,
Representatives of the African Union Commission,
Distinguished Experts and Delegates,
Traditional Leaders,
Colleagues and Partners,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I bring you warm greetings from South Africa and from the leadership of the Southern Africa Network of Traditional Leaders in Drug Demand Reduction (SANTLDDR). It is an honour to address this important opening session as we begin shaping the next continental framework on drug control and crime prevention.

This meeting continues the African Union's commitment to a balanced, people-centred, public health and development-oriented drug control strategy, aligned with Agenda 2063 and the AU Plan of Action (2019–25).

We gather at a time when Africa faces unprecedented drug-related challenges, rising trafficking routes, expanding domestic markets, the non-medical use of pharmaceutical opioids, and the increasing vulnerability of our youth and communities. These concerns have been clearly illustrated by the AU Commission and are central to the purpose of this meeting.

But we also gather at a moment of renewed opportunity, to help co-create a stronger, more inclusive, more African-driven continental plan.

In May 2024, traditional leaders from across Southern Africa gathered in Johannesburg for the landmark AU consultation that led to the launch of SANTLDDR, a pilot sub-regional mechanism to integrate traditional leadership into drug demand reduction.

The AU Commission has since urged Member States to recognise this structure, appoint focal points, establish national councils, and embed traditional leadership within national policies and legislative processes.

The vision is clear: ***traditional leaders must be recognised as implementers, knowledge holders, and central partners in the continent's drug response.***

It is encouraging to note the intent by the AUC to ensure that communities and traditional leaders are embedded at the centre of the next AU Plan of Action and at the heart of national drug strategies across the



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continent. This was evidenced by the AUC engaging me directly as the Chairperson of the SANTLDDR on my reflections regarding the implementation of the AUPA 2019-25, before this consultation.

This echoes the AU's commitment to people-driven development in Agenda 2063 and the institutionalisation of cultural and community governance systems.

Allow me to reflect on a historic moment for Africa. In a few days, South Africa will host the G20 Leaders Summit, a culmination of South Africa's G20 presidency, this will be done on African soil for the very first time in history.

This is more than a diplomatic achievement. It is a signal that Africa's voice, priorities, and developmental challenges are gaining the global recognition long overdue.

The G20, represents major global economies, providing a platform for Africa to:

- Advocate for health financing mechanisms that strengthen prevention, treatment, and mental health services.
- Promote global partnerships to counter transnational drug trafficking networks.
- Highlight the nexus between drugs, development, unemployment, and instability, which disproportionately affects African youth.
- Champion alternative development, fair trade, and poverty alleviation strategies that address the structural drivers of substance use.
- Ensure that global health, taxation, and development discussions incorporate Africa's realities.

This is a moment that Africa must seize with unity of purpose.

The challenges we face, from drug trafficking to youth vulnerability, from inadequate treatment services to socio-economic inequalities, are shared, cross-border, and deeply interconnected.

No nation can conquer them alone.

Africa must strengthen its cooperation by:

- Sharing data, intelligence, and evidence
- Supporting each other's community-level responses
- Harmonising legislation and regional frameworks
- Strengthening cross-border law enforcement cooperation
- Investing collectively in prevention and youth empowerment
- Elevating indigenous knowledge and relevant traditional systems
- Speaking with one voice on global platforms like the G20 and the UN

The AU Plan of Action (2026–2030) must reflect this unity of purpose and continental solidarity.

South Africa will also host our Central Drug Authority's 4th Biennial Summit on Substance Use and Illicit Trafficking **from** 26–27 November 2025.



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I am honoured to speak there as both the Chairperson of the National House of Traditional and Khoi-San Leaders (NHTKL) and SANTLDDR.

The Summit will focus on amongst others:

- Translating South Africa's National Drug Master Plan (NDMP) into practice
- Strengthening community engagement in implementing the NDMP
- Fostering regional collaboration and continental alignment

This gathering will be another opportunity to solidify cross-country collaboration and elevate Africa's united stance on drug control and community resilience.

As South Africa revises its NDMP for 2025–30, our goal is clear:

A national drug plan that is community-driven, collaboratively and coordinatively implemented.

I sincerely hope that the AU's successor Plan of Action (2026–30), which we initiate here, adopts a similar stance by:

- Recognising communities and traditional leaders as core partners
- Strengthening prevention and community resilience
- Enhancing community-level screening, brief interventions, and referral systems
- Establishing national councils and regional networks like SANTLDDR
- Mobilising technical and financial support for grassroots structures

As the AU stated, traditional knowledge systems and leadership structures remain strategic assets in Africa's response.

As we commence this Technical Experts Meeting, I extend deep appreciation to the AU Commission, the Government of Mozambique, and all Member States represented here.

Let us use this gathering to build a visionary, united, and African-driven Plan of Action, one that:

- Is evidence-based
- Is rooted in community realities
- Elevates traditional leaders
- Strengthens continental cooperation
- Protects our youth
- And advances Africa's shared prosperity and resilience

This is our opportunity to shape **The Africa We Want** through unity, commitment, and action.

I thank you.

