

COMESA, by using its conflict and early warning system has extracted global historical data along 54 structural indicators that work together to affect the peace and conflict dynamics in the region.

This was said during the official opening of the Twelfth Meeting of the COMESA Committee on Peace and Security at Mulungushi International Conference Center in Lusaka, by the Assistant Secretary-General, Ambassador Nagla El-Hussainy.

She added that COMESA is beginning to see the potential of COMWARN to support economic developments while at the same time mitigating conflict.

“For example, this data highlights that over the last two decades, there has been a significant rural to urban migration in the COMESA region with 70 percent of the people living in rural areas in 1991 compared to 64.8 percent in 2010,” she said.

“This is an average figure with some countries like Zambia and Mauritius showing slight urban to rural migration. At the same time, during that same period, there has been an increase in arable land use in the region, from an average of 15.3 percent to 17.9 percent with a big increase reflected between 2007 and 2009 to coincide with the rise in commodity prices during that period.”

Ambassador El-Hussainy said that by analysing the empirically defined linkages to conflict, one can already start to see an entry point for intervention especially as the above statistics are linked to the acquisition of large pieces of arable land from investors from United Arab Emirates, South Korea, India, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and China.

She said this alerts COMESA as a regional body to get more concerned with the increase in foreign investors in the region, because if this is coupled with the effects of climate change, it could lead to serious land pressures and resource conflicts.

“Many of these factors change gradually over time but when considered together then the impact can be quite significant and we may need to start looking for ways to address these issues before they break out”, she concluded. The meeting took place on 11 October 2012.