

The Vice-President of the Republic of Zambia, Dr Guy Scott, has said that for bilateral arrangements to work, controls at the border posts need to be coordinated to enable all the authorities concerned to work together to define priorities and establish common risk profiles.

Speaking during the official opening of the Fifth Meeting of Ministers Responsible for Immigration in the COMESA region at Mulungushi International Conference Centre on 11 October 2012, Vice-President Scott said in a speech read for him by Home Affairs Minister, Edgar Lungu that it is vital for all agencies to share information, especially in relation to international crimes, terrorism, drug smuggling and human trafficking networks.

Dr Scott said traders have to declare their goods to customs officers who carry out an initial risk analysis as this will allow for centralized data collection and the simplification of administrative procedures for the traders.

“Relevant information or intelligence should be shared between the agencies at the central level and the border control posts so that work can be made easier for the officers,” he said. “I do note that your meeting will also discuss interagency cooperation on immigration matters and I am pleased to learn that most Member States, Zambia inclusive have already completed the computerization of visa processing at major points of entry which is an important step towards inter-agency cooperation on immigration matters.”

Speaking at the same function, Assistant Secretary-General, Ambassador Nagla El-Hussainy said in order for COMESA to be able to deepen the integration agenda, there is need to look at the COMESA programme on the free movement of persons as a trade facilitation measure.

Ambassador El-Hussainy said there is therefore an urgent need to implement fully the Protocol on the Gradual Relaxation and Eventual Relaxation of visa which is in force.

“We call upon Member States to put more signatures and ratification on the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, Service Labour and Right of Establishment,” Ambassador El-Hussainy said.

“I have all the confidence that through your decisions in this meeting, you shall be able to guide us on practical steps that will encourage more Member States to join the Republics of Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda and Zimbabwe which have already signed the Protocol and as in the case of Burundi, ratify it as well.”

She said that COMESA’s economic integration has made significant progress in contributing to poverty alleviation in the region through trade and investment.

“It is, therefore, important that we put more efforts into addressing aspects of free movement of persons such as information sharing and the development of a regional database for migration management in the region. We also need to address negative aspects of migration such as organized transnational crimes, top of which is human trafficking and smuggling,” she said.

The recommendations of the Ministers’ meeting will be presented for approval to the Council of Ministers’ meeting in Kampala, Uganda