

"Uganda has undertaken extensive stakeholder consultations regarding joining the COMESA Free Trade Area," said Amb. Julius Onen, the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Co-operatives, Uganda.

"In this regard, and based on previous studies, it has been recommended that Uganda adopts a phased approach to acceding to the Tripartite Free Trade Area, first by joining the COMESA Free Trade Area and ultimately joining the Tripartite Free Trade Area when it is fully established". fully established.

" Ambassador Onen, said this while officiating at the opening of the 14th COMESA Budgetary and Administrative Committee Meeting that was held in Kampala, Uganda on 13th November, 2012. He welcomed delegates to Uganda and encouraged them to take off time from their busy schedule and appreciate the natural scenery in the neighbourhood and enjoy the natural beauty that God blessed Uganda with.

He informed the delegates that in line with the theme for both the policy organs' and the Summit meetings, a number of reforms and policies have been embarked on by Uganda especially the development of the SME policy, the SPS policy and related regulations, the industrial and trade policy and most recently the standards and quality assurance policy.

Amb. Onen reiterated the need to focus on the commitments outlined in the COMESA medium term strategic plan (2011-2015).

"We need to look at the achievements and challenges in executing the previous strategic plan of 2007-2010. It is from this experience that we can pick lessons and better approaches to tackle the challenges ahead."

Members were informed that Uganda is fully aware of the immense benefits of regional integration, which it has prioritised in line with its export-led development strategy and solidarity with her neighbours and Africa in general.

"That is why Uganda remains committed to her obligation and membership to COMESA, EAC, IGAD and the African Union," he said.

Amb. Onen reaffirmed Uganda's commitment to all COMESA activities and the integration agenda.

"Uganda will do everything possible to coordinate and mobilise other stakeholders to embrace and coordinate the gains made in the COMESA region so far."

The meeting was attended by delegates from Burundi, DRC, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Rwanda, Swaziland, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.