

“Ever since independence, our national leaders have been ardent champions of the cause of India-Africa cooperation. As I look into the 21st century, I am convinced that the free people of new Africa and a new India will come even closer, through mutually beneficial relationships based on equality and fraternity,” said Mr Ashok Kumar.

Mr Kumar who is the Special Representative of India to COMESA was speaking at the COMESA Council of Ministers meeting on 19 November 2012 in Kampala, Uganda.

He congratulated COMESA on the impressive strides made since its inception, which have greatly contributed to economic prosperity through regional integration.

He also thanked COMESA for progress in eliminating Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs) such as import licensing requirement, foreign exchange restrictions, removal of import and export quotas, easing of customs formalities and improved functioning of border posts.

Mr Kumar commended COMESA on the launch of the COMESA Customs Union in 2009 and the COMESA Regional Payment and Settlement System in 2012. He said, “Both these immensely important measures will further assist in increasing the intra regional trade.”

He underscored the importance of the India-Africa Forum Summits as new mechanisms to enhance development partnerships. In this regard, a number of initiatives were announced in Addis Ababa in 2011 to further strengthen India cooperation with Africa including the offer of lines of credit of US\$ 5 billion, over 22,000 scholarships to Africa over the next three years and the establishment of over 80 capacity building institutions in Africa.

This is in addition to a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed in February 2003 between India and COMESA, which forms the basis of India-COMESA cooperation. Another MOU was signed between the COMESA Business Council and the Confederation of Indian Industries in 2009.

Some of the high profile meetings held between Africa and India include the first ever meeting between India and the African RECs in New Delhi in November 2010, the Confederation of Indian Industry Partnership Summit in 2008 and the Second India-Africa Forum Summit in 2011.

Draft Terms of Reference for the COMESA-India Joint Study Group have been discussed and it is hoped that these talks will examine the feasibility of the India-COMESA Preferential Trade Agreement and/or the formation of the Free Trade Agreement.

In conclusion, Mr Kumar reiterated India's commitment to pursue a reinvigorated and multi-dimensional India-Africa partnership and added, "There is strong political will towards meaningful and timely implementation of various proposals and India's efforts in this direction will bear the desired results if our actions are in concert with each other."