

President Yoweri Museveni has urged African countries to work towards regional integration as this is a sure way to achieve economic integration. He said, "This is the major therapy that Africa needs." While addressing Heads of State and delegates at the opening of the 16th Summit of the COMESA Heads of State and Government on 23 November 2012 in Kampala, Uganda, President Museveni said that integration should have two dimensions: economic and political. He however noted that although it is unrealistic to aspire for the political federation of Africa at this time, the East African Community is already aiming at political federation as its ultimate goal.

"The people of East Africa have been yearning for both political and economic integration while COMESA aims at economic integration because political integration at a continental level is unrealistic. However, I am glad that we are in the COMESA-EAC-SADC Tripartite which will enable us to achieve economic integration," Mr Museveni added.

He commended COMESA for the efforts made in the pursuit of economic integration in Africa and added that the efforts made so far were realistic and necessary and applauded the COMESA-EAC-SADC Tripartite agreement, which has seen Africa's trade volumes increase to about US\$ 18.8 billion and added that these figures will increase with improved infrastructure, especially in railway linkages, throughout the region.

President Museveni compared China to East Africa and outlined how the latter has attracted about US\$ 1.32 trillion in Foreign Direct Investment despite their communist ideology and lack of multi-party democracy.

"The stimulus factors that have aided phenomenal growth in China include the size of its population, land mass, dynamism and rich societal culture as well as the lack of political balkanisation. These factors have led China to become the second biggest economy in the world."

He added that on the other hand, Africa was characterised by balkanisation which undermine the continent's bargaining power and capacity to negotiate as a larger economic bloc.

President Museveni urged delegates to operationalise the Lagos Action Plan, which advocates for African nations to organise themselves for trade and tackle balkanisation.

Delegates were urged to create a unified trading space for posterity by concluding talks on the African Common Market as this will foster better negotiation with trading partners in the United States, European Union, Russia, South America and Japan.

He concluded by urging COMESA to unite in a bid to realise strength.

At the same function, President Museveni of Uganda took over the chairmanship of the COMESA Authority of Heads of State and Government. He takes over from Her Excellency, Mrs Joyce Banda, President of the Republic of Malawi and outgoing chairperson of the

Authority. The chairmanship of COMESA is on a one year rotational basis.