

LUSAKA, ZAMBIA - The COMESA Committee of Elders convened a three-day familiarization meeting on the institution's programmes, at the Secretariat, on June 10-12 2012.

The meeting, opened by Secretary-General, Mr Sindiso Ngwenya, discussed a wide range of issues that call for an integrated approach in order to address the challenges faced by the region; and emphasis was put on the need for the region to rely on its resources in order to support self-sustaining economic development.

The following Members of the COMESA Committee of Elders participated in the meeting: His Excellency Sir James Mancham, the first President of the Republic of Seychelles; Ambassador Bethuel Kiplagat from Kenya; Hon. Immerculee Nahayo from Burundi; Ambassador Soad Shalaby from Egypt; Ambassador Berhane Ghebray from Ethiopia; Ambassador Anund Priyay from Mauritius; Hon. Atem Garang Dekuek from South Sudan, and Ambassador Simbi Mubako from Zimbabwe.

Also in attendance were Ambassador Muchanga, Acting Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry of the Republic of Zambia; High Commissioners and Ambassadors accredited to Zambia and Permanent Representatives to COMESA from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Arab Republic of Egypt, Kenya, Malawi, the Sudan and Zimbabwe.

The Committee also interacted with the Executive Management and managers of various programmes of the Common Market with the view of not only concretizing strategies for intervention in ongoing conflicts in the region but also identifying entry points to support the broader integration agenda. They were briefed in the areas of: peace and security, conflict early warning system, the programme on democracy and governance, the war economy component of the conflict prevention, management and resolution programme, the trading for peace programme, the programme that supports the involvement of civil society and private sector organizations in peace and security and the Africa Peace Facility Early Response Mechanism. The programmes in trade, investment promotion and private sector development, infrastructure development, Gender and Social Affairs, ACTESA and CAADP were also covered.

The COMESA Committee of Elders was established by the Summit of the COMESA Authority

during the Eleventh Summit held in Djibouti in 2006, to support the office of the Secretary-General with preventive diplomacy.

During the meeting, the Members of the Committee of Elders interacted with officers that implement peace and security programmes, including the conflict early warning system, the programme on democracy and governance, the war economy component of the conflict prevention, management and resolution programme, the trading for peace programme, the programme that supports the involvement of civil society and private sector organization in peace and security and the Africa Peace Facility Early Response Mechanism. The Members of the Committee were also briefed by senior staff of the Secretariat that implement programmes in trade, investment promotion and private sector development, infrastructure development, Gender and Social Affairs, ACTESA and CAADP.

During the meeting the Members of the Committee, *inter-alia*:

1. Expressed gratitude to the Secretary General and commended him on his efforts which have yielded visible results in the region; noted the achievements made by COMESA and committed to carry his vision towards more integrated and self sustaining region.

2. Acknowledged the importance of peace, security and stability as a prerequisite to the economic integration and development of the COMESA region and identified the need to address peace and security within the lenses of regional integration and economic and social development.

3. Noted the generally improved status of peace and security and reaffirmed their commitments to promote and support the promotion of peace and security within the framework of the COMESA regional integration agenda;

4. Identified the need for the region to consolidate the gains made in the democratization process and stressed on the importance of addressing the structural factors, laws and legislation as a conflict prevention measure; while with respect to governance the members agreed on the need to firstly agree on a clear definition of good governance within the context of the region and to also embrace inclusive programmes that include the gender balance and the inclusion of youth. The members also addressed their role in supporting peaceful elections through the observation of elections supported by pre-elections assessment missions and concluded with post elections missions.

5. Identified new threats to insecurity and stability, including piracy, which was seen as a war economy issue and the effects of climate change and identified the need to channel resources to proactively address these challenges. They also noted relatively large resources that are still channeled to national defense and identified the urgent need to address security challenges in order to re-channel the resources into social development activities.

6. Acknowledged the huge resource potential in the continent which makes Africa a continent for the future and discussed the need to identify strategies that can channel these resources to the benefit of the continent. They further emphasized on the need for Africa to

enhance its confidence in its own ability to find solutions for its problems and to aim at addressing these challenges from within.

7. Noted the importance of collaboration with the AU Panel of the Wise and other African mediators and agreed on the important need for COMESA to find a niche that will enable them to add value and support the ongoing peace processes in the COMESA region and also initiate peace building and peacemaking initiatives.

The Committee completed its three day meeting and agreed on a set of several broad initiatives including policy research to guide intervention, which would be addressed jointly by the Secretariat and the Committee over the coming months.

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