****

REPUBLIC OF ZAMBIA

**SPEECH BY**

**HER HONOUR THE VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF ZAMBIA**

**MRS. W. K. MUTALE NALUMANGO, MP**

**DURING**

**THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE 42ND COMESA**

**COUNCIL OF MINISTERS MEETING**

**LUSAKA, ZAMBIA**

**9TH NOVEMBER, 2021**

CABINET OFFICE

LUSAKA

NOVEMBER, 2021

* **CHAIRPERSON OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS;**
* **HONOURABLE MINISTERS;**
* **THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF COMESA;**
* **YOUR EXCELLENCIES AMBASSADORS AND HIGH COMMISSIONERS ACCREDITED TO THE REPUBLIC OF ZAMBIA AND PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVES TO COMESA;**
* **REPRESENTATIVES OF INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL ORGANISATIONS;**
* **OUR CO-OPERATING PARTNERS HERE PRESENT;**
* **HEADS OF COMESA INSTITUTIONS;**
* **MEMBERS OF STAFF OF THE COMESA SECRETARIAT;**
* **DISTINGUISHED DELEGATES;**
* **MEMBERS OF THE PRESS;**
* **INVITED GUESTS;**
* **DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN.**

LET ME BEGIN BY BRINGING TO YOU FRATERNAL GREETINGS, ON BEHALF OF THE PEOPLE OF ZAMBIA, FROM THE PRESIDENT, MR. HAKAINDE HICHILEMA, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF ZAMBIA. WE ARE VERY HAPPY TO HOST YOU HERE FOR THIS IMPORTANT MEETING. LET ME ALSO EXPRESS GRATITUDE TO THE COMESA SECRETARY GENERAL, HER EXCELLENCY, MADAM CHILESHE MPUNDU KAPWEPWE AND THE COMESA SECRETARIAT STAFF FOR THE STEWARDSHIP IN ORGANISING THIS MEETING, ESPECIALLY THAT THIS MEETING IS HAPPENING AT A TIME WHEN OUR REGION AND THE WORLD AT LARGE ARE STILL EXPERIENCING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.

NOTWITHSTANDING THE CHALLENGES CAUSED BY THE PANDEMIC, THIS MEETING PRESENTS AN OPPORTUNE TIME FOR COMESA TO TAKE STOCK OF ITS PERFORMANCE AND CHART A DEFINING PATH TOWARDS THE AFRICA WE WANT AS DEFINED BY THE AGENDA 2063 WHICH IS AND I QUOTE, ***“AN INTEGRATED, PROSPEROUS AND PEACEFUL AFRICA, DRIVEN BY ITS OWN CITIZENS, REPRESENTING A DYNAMIC FORCE IN THE INTERNATIONAL* ARENA**” END OF QUOTE.

THE AGENDA 2063 IS CALLING ON US TO WORK TOGETHER, AS AFRICA, IN ORDER FOR US AS COMESA, WE MUST REMAIN INTEGRATED AND CONTINUE TO WORK TOWARDS ATTAINING A PROSPEROUS AND PEACEFUL AFRICA, USING OUR OWN SOLUTIONS THROUGH OUR CITIZENS. WE ALSO LOOK BEYOND OUR OWN BLOCK, AS COMESA, AND TAKE NOTE OF OTHER OPPORTUNITIES PRESENTED BY OTHER REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC BLOCKS AND ORGANISATIONS, SUCH AS THOSE ARISING FROM THE RECENT COMMITMENTS MADE AT THE 26TH UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE OF PARTIES ON CLIMATE CHANGE (COP-26) AND THE COMMITMENTS FROM THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION WHICH ARE HELPING US FIGHT THE GLOBAL HEALTH CRISIS TRIGGERED BY COVID-19 PANDEMIC.

**DISTINGUISHED HON. MINISTERS, EXCELLENCIES, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,**

I AM HAPPY TO NOTE THAT DESPITE THE GLOBAL CHALLENGES, COMESA HAS CONTINUED TO EMBRACE THE OPPORTUNITIES AND CONTINUES TO PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF OUR REGIONAL ECONOMIES, THROUGH REGIONAL ECONOMIC INTEGRATION INITIATIVES. THROUGH THIS, COMESA HAS CONTINUED TO ALIGN WITH AND FULFILL THE ASPIRATIONS OF THE AFRICAN UNION TOWARDS CONTINENTAL INTEGRATION. MOST IMPORTANTLY, COMESA HAS CONTINUED TO WORK THROUGH INSTITUTIONS SUCH AS THE TRADE DEVELOPMENT BANK, AFRICAN TRADE INSURANCE AGENCY AND THE CLEARING HOUSE, AMONG OTHERS, TO PROMOTE THE TRADE INTEGRATION AGENDA. THIS HAS RESULTED IN INCREASED TRADE AND INVESTMENTS IN THE REGION SIGNIFYING THE IMPORTANT ROLE THAT TRADE INSTRUMENTS PLAY IN CUSHIONING OUR ECONOMIES AGAINST ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND POLITICAL SHOCKS. THE TRADE PLATFORM, WHICH IS PROVIDING THE CONTINUED FLOW OF GOODS AND SERVICES ACROSS OUR COUNTRIES, ENABLES ACCESS TO STRATEGIC FOOD AND MEDICAL SUPPLIES IN THE REGION.

I AM FURTHER ENCOURAGED TO NOTE THAT COMESA HAS EMBRACED INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE VARIOUS TRADE FACILITATION PROGRAMMES. THESE INCLUDE AUTOMATING CUSTOMS CLEARANCE PROCEDURES, THE ONLINE NON-TARIFF BARRIERS REPORTING AND MONITORING SYSTEM AS WELL AS THE ELECTRONIC CERTIFICATE OF ORIGIN PROTOTYPE, WHICH IS READY FOR PILOTING. IT IS EXPECTED THAT THIS WILL ENHANCE CROSS-BORDER TRADE AND INVESTMENTS.

THIS IS AS IT SHOULD BE GIVEN THAT DIGITAL TRADE IS NOW SHAPING THE GLOBAL ECONOMIES. IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WE REMAIN RELEVANT IN THE GLOBAL MARKET BY EMBRACING THE NEW WAY OF INTEGRATING WITH OTHERS. THIS IS ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT IN THE COVID-19 ERA AND MUST CONTINUE POST COVID-19.

FOR US IN ZAMBIA, THIS IS WHAT OUR NEW GOVERNMENT WANTS TO SEE. WE ASPIRE TO ATTAIN DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND USE TECHNOLOGY TO DRIVE OUR ECONOMY IN OUR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AGENDA.

**DISTINGUISHED HON. MINISTERS, EXCELLENCIES, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,**

AS WE MOVE FORWARD, IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WE TAKE NOTE OF THE CHALLENGES THAT WE HAVE ENCOUNTERED AND WORK TOWARDS OVERCOMING THEM. LET US USE THE VALUABLE LESSONS TO DO BETTER IN THE FUTURE. LET US ALSO CONTINUE TO USE THE OPPORTUNITIES PROVIDED BY THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY. WE MUST ADAPT THESE OPPORTUNITIES TO OUR OWN NEEDS AND WORK TOWARDS ENDING POVERTY AND ACHIEVING PROSPERITY FOR OUR PEOPLE. THE NEW COMESA STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE PERIOD 2021-2025 IS POISED TO CONSOLIDATE THE GAINS ACHIEVED.

LET US DO MORE IN ENHANCING NEW MARKETS AND TRADE OPPORTUNITIES. WE MUST WORK TOWARDS FULLY REALISING THE TRIPARTITE FREE TRADE AREA AND THE AFRICAN CONTINENTAL FREE TRADE AREA. IT IS IN THIS REGARD THAT WE MUST FURTHER ENHANCE TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT AS PART OF OUR EFFORTS IN REDUCING THE COST OF DOING BUSINESS IN THE COMESA REGION. THIS IS ONE SURE WAY OF MAKING COMESA MORE COMPETITIVE WITHIN THE CONTINENTAL TRADE AGENDA.

**DISTINGUISHED HON MINISTERS, EXCELLENCIES, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,**

AS I CONCLUDE, I WANT TO EMPHASISE THAT WE MUST CONTINUE TO PAY SPECIAL FOCUS ON SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS IN ALL THAT WE DO. THE YOUTH AND WOMEN ARE INTEGRAL IN OUR DEVELOPMENT. BY THE SAME TOKEN, WE NEED TO MAKE IMPROVEMENTS IN OUR GOVERNANCE, PEACE AND SECURITY SYSTEMS WITHIN OUR REGION AS A PRE-REQUISITE TO SOCIAL COHESION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.

WE MUST ALSO CONTINUE TO OVERCOME THE CHALLENGES WE COME ACROSS AS WE MOVE FORWARD, SUCH AS THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC EFFECTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND CLIMATE CHANGE. WE MUST STEER AFRICA TO GREATER HEIGHTS OF DEVELOPMENT AND PROSPERITY.

I, THEREFORE, APPEAL TO COUNCIL MEMBERS, AS POLICY MAKERS IN THE RESPECTIVE COUNTRIES, TO REVIEW COUNTRY COMMITMENTS TO REGIONAL INTEGRATION AND RE-DEDICATE OURSELVES TO THE IDEALS AND GOALS SET OUT IN THE COMESA TREATY.

**DISTINGUISHED HON. MINISTERS, EXCELLENCIES, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,**

IT IS NOW MY SINGULAR HONOUR AND PRIVILEGE TO DECLARE THIS 42ND MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS OFFICIALLY OPEN. WE LOOK FORWARD TO THE OUTCOMES OF THIS IMPORTANT AND STRATEGIC MEETING.

**I THANK YOU.**