REPUBLIC OF MALAWI

SPEECH

BY

HIS EXCELLENCY

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AT THE COMESA SUMMIT

FOR HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since this is the first time for me to attend the COMESA Summit, I bring you warm greetings from the people of Malawi.

As Malawians, we call our country the Warm Heart of Africa, but I believe I speak for all Malawians when I say that Zambia also feels to us as warm as a home away from home. So I thank His Excellency President Hakainde Hichilema of the Republic of Zambia and the people of Zambia for being such excellent hosts. I want you to know that we are delighted by your assumption of the Chairship of COMESA, and as you build on the great work done by His Excellency President Abdel Fatta el-Asisi of the Arab Republic of Egypt, I assure you of Malawi's full support.

The work that lies before us as a body is true and full economic integration. And the theme for this Summit, namely 'Economic Integration for a Thriving COMESA Anchored on Green Investment, Value addition and Tourism', is a reflection of our collective awareness that

economic integration is the great challenge and need of our time. There is no doubt in my mind that we all agree about the necessity of economic integration, but I am concerned that we as a body are not yet pursuing it with the urgency it deserves. From my perspective, we must accept two realities that necessitate that we move with speed on economic integration.

The first of these realities is the devastating period we find ourselves in. Since 2017, ours has been a block of nations under multiple devastating assaults. In that six year period, we have had Cyclone Idai, Tropical Storms Ana and Gombe, and Cyclone Freddy. In that same period, we have suffered droughts, the effects of the war in Eastern Europe, and outbreaks such as Covid-19 and cholera. These external assaults have compounded the devastation we were already under from historic systemic vulnerabilities, such as weak food systems, weak financial controls, weak health systems, weak public institutions, unsustainable debt levels, and international trade policies that disadvantage our economies. All of these factors have become the perfect storm that has left us as a block in a weak position in

the context of global trade. That is why all of us agreed that our only chance of improving our position is to leverage the strength in our numbers, to integrate our economies urgently so that we have collective resilience against unpredictable external forces that are coming against us with greater and greater frequency over time.

Secondly, our economic integration is a matter of urgency because since the time we ratified the African Continental Free Trade Area, there have already been forces from beyond our continent moving into position to work our own economic framework to their advantage rather than ours. As such, if we do not quickly get our act together with economic integration on our own terms, it may very well be that by the time we fully integrate, the mechanism will have already been rigged against us to ensure that the beneficiaries of our economic integration are non-African economies.

For this reason, I call on all of us to move with speed on the key pillars of our economic integration. Those pillars include working together to increase our productive capacities in key sectors such as agriculture, tourism,

and mining, which we have adopted in Malawi and refer to as The ATM Strategy; liberalizing and harmonizing processes for facilitating the movement of goods and people across our borders; developing and synchronizing our infrastructural, transport, energy, digital, and financial, and law-enforcement systems to cut out inefficiencies and illegalities that are used to defraud our economies; and most importantly, trading, trading, trading, trading, trading, and trading amongst ourselves.

That is what we must do, and we must do it now with no apology to anybody.

Thank you for your attention.