



REPUBLIC OF ZAMBIA

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS DELIVERED BY
HER HONOUR THE VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC
OF ZAMBIA,**

MRS. INONGE MUTUKWA WINA, MP.

**DURING THE SEVENTH EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE COMESA
COUNCIL OF MINISTERS**

Theme: "COMESA Towards Digital Economic Integration"

**HELD AT COMESA SECRETARIAT CONFERENCE CENTRE,
LUSAKA**

ON FRIDAY 5TH APRIL, 2019

CABINET OFFICE

LUSAKA

APRIL, 2019

- **HON CHRISTOPHER YALUMA, MP; MINISTER OF COMMERCE, TRADE AND INDUSTRY OF THE REPUBLIC OF ZAMBIA**
- **YOUR EXCELLENCY MADAM LANTOSOA RAKOTOMALALA, CHAIRPERSON OF THE COMESA COUNCIL OF MINISTERS AND MINISTER OF INDUSTRY, TRADE AND HANDCRAFT OF THE REPUBLIC OF MADAGASCAR,**
- **HONOURABLE MEMBERS OF THE BUREAU OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS,**
- **HONOURABLE MINISTERS,**
- **YOUR EXCELLENCY MADAM CHILESHE MPUNDU KAPWEPWE, SECRETARY GENERAL OF COMESA,**
- **EXCELLENCIES, THE ASSISTANT SECRETARIES GENERAL OF COMESA,**
- **EXCELLENCIES, THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVES TO COMESA,**
- **EXCELLENCIES, THE SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVES TO COMESA,**
- **EXCELLENCIES, AMBASSADORS AND HIGH COMMISSIONERS,**
- **DISTINGUISHED CO-OPERATING PARTNERS,**
- **REPRESENTATIVES OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS,**
- **DISTINGUISHED DELEGATES,**
- **INVITED GUESTS,**
- **MEMBERS OF THE PRINT AND ELECTRONIC MEDIA,**
- **LADIES AND GENTLEMEN;**

IT IS AN HONOUR FOR ME TO ADDRESS THIS DISTINGUISHED GATHERING OF DELEGATES DURING THIS OCCASION OF THE SEVENTH EXTRAORDINARY COMESA COUNCIL OF MINISTERS.

LET ME BEGIN BY SHARING OUR WARM WELCOME TO YOU ALL FOR VISITING ZAMBIA – A COUNTRY FULL OF BEAUTY, WONDER, A HAVEN OF PEACE AND THE REGIONAL HUB NOT JUST FOR COMESA BUT ALSO SOUTHERN AFRICA. WE ARE VERY PLEASED TO HOST THE HONOURABLE MINISTERS AND ALL DELEGATES. THEREFORE, AS YOU CONDUCT THE BUSINESS AHEAD OF YOU, FEEL FREE BECAUSE ZAMBIA IS THE HOME OF COMESA, AND IN THIS REGARD, ZAMBIA IS YOUR TRUE HOME. **KARIBU** AND ENJOY YOUR STAY.

IT IS ALSO OUR SINCERE HOPE THAT YOU WILL HAVE AMPLE TIME TO VISIT AND ENJOY WONDERFUL MOMENTS IN THE CITY OF LUSAKA AS WELL AS SAMPLE SOME OF OUR TOURIST ATTRACTIONS INCLUDING THE NATURAL WONDER OF THE WORLD – THE FAMOUS VICTORIA FALLS.

**HONOURABLE MINISTERS,
DISTINGUISHED DELEGATES,**

YOUR PRESENCE HERE TODAY IS YET ANOTHER TESTIMONY OF YOUR PASSIONATE COMMITMENT TO BUILDING COMESA AND ITS INTEGRATION PROGRAMMES WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE AFRICAN UNION. TO FURTHER BOOST REGIONAL INTEGRATION AND THE 2063 AFRICAN UNION AGENDA TOWARDS A SINGLE ECONOMIC BLOC, I AM PLEASED TO NOTE THE PROGRESS MADE BY THE COMMON MARKET FOR EASTERN AND SOUTHERN AFRICA (COMESA), THE EAST AFRICAN COMMUNITY (ECA) AND THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY (SADC), TO FORM A SINGLE TRIPARTITE FREE TRADE AREA AHEAD OF THE CONTINENTAL FREE TRADE AREA.

IT IS WORTH NOTING THAT THE TRIPARTITE FREE TRADE AREA FORMS THE LARGEST REGIONAL ECONOMIC COMMUNITY IN AFRICA, COMPRISING 27

AFRICAN COUNTRIES, WITH A COMBINED POPULATION OF 720 MILLION PEOPLE, AND A TOTAL GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT OF 1.5 TRILLION UNITED STATES DOLLARS BASED ON TRADE DATA RECORDED IN 2017.

AGAINST THIS BACKGROUND, I AM PLEASED TO NOTE THAT THE OBJECTIVE OF THIS MEETING IS TO CONSIDER, AMONG OTHER ITEMS, RECOMMENDATIONS FROM A MEETING OF A SELECT COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS HELD IN JANUARY, 2019, RELATING TO ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY MATTERS OF THE COMESA SECRETARIAT.

THIS IS AS IT SHOULD BE, BECAUSE OUR EFFECTIVENESS AS A REGIONAL ECONOMIC COMMUNITY CAN ONLY BE AS GOOD AS THE EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF OUR SECRETARIAT. IN ADDITION, THE SMOOTH OPERATION OF THE SECRETARIAT ALSO SERVES AS AN IMPORTANT SIGNAL AND ASSURANCE TO OUR PARTNERS WHO HAVE DEDICATED RESOURCES TO SUPPORT OUR PROGRAMMES AND PROJECTS. NOTWITHSTANDING THE COMMENDABLE SUPPORT FROM OUR PARTNERS, LET US STRIVE TO MOBILISE RESOURCES FROM WITHIN THE MEMBER STATES. IN THIS WAY, COMESA ACTIVITIES WILL BE MORE SUSTAINABLE, WHILE THE GOODWILL OF OUR PARTNERS GOES TO SUPPLEMENT OUR EFFORTS.

**HONOURABLE MINISTERS,
DISTINGUISHED DELEGATES,**

I HAVE ALSO TAKEN NOTE OF THE THEME FOR THIS MEETING; "**COMESA TOWARDS DIGITAL ECONOMIC INTEGRATION**". BE ASSURED THAT I AM NOT GOING TO ASK THE HONOURABLE MINISTERS, AS POLICY MAKERS, TO DEFINE WHAT DIGITAL ECONOMIC INTEGRATION MEANS, BUT IT IS

IMPORTANT THAT WE ALL UNDERSTAND, THROUGH THE DELIBERATIONS, THE BENEFITS AND POSITIVE IMPACTS OF A DIGITAL ECONOMY IN ANY GIVEN COUNTRY.

THE DIGITAL ECONOMY IS ABOUT TRANSFORMING PEOPLE'S LIVES THROUGH BETTER CHOICES AND ACCESS TO RESOURCES, POSSIBILITIES AND GREATER CONVENIENCE THAT DRIVES VALUE FOR PEOPLE THAN EVER BEFORE; USING INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGIES INCLUDING THE INTERNET.

THEREFORE, UNLESS WE REALISE THAT THE ECONOMIC INTEGRATION WE ARE TALKING ABOUT IS NOT FOR ME AND YOU, BUT MORE FOR OUR GRANDCHILDREN AND THOSE YET TO BE BORN, OUR DELIBERATIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES MUST BE MOTIVATED BY THE NEED TO LAY A SOLID FOUNDATION UPON WHICH OUR ASPIRATIONS ABOUT THE COMESA AND AFRICA WE WANT, NOW AND IN THE FUTURE, CAN BE BUILT.

**HONOURABLE MINISTERS,
DISTINGUISHED DELEGATES,**

AT THE HEART OF COMMERCE AND TRADE IN COMESA IS THE NEED TO HARMONISE CROSS BORDER ACTIVITIES, SYSTEMS AND TRANSACTIONS. THIS IS WHERE ECONOMIES BECOME DIGITAL THROUGH CUSTOMS, TRANSPORT, TRAVEL AND LOGISTICAL SERVICES DRIVEN MORE BY TECHNOLOGIES THAN TRADITIONAL ADMINISTRATIVE APPROACHES. IN THIS REGARD, FACTORY FLOOR PRODUCTION PROCESSES CAN BE ENHANCED BY TECHNOLOGIES WHILE PRE-SHIPMENT INFORMATION SHARING ACROSS COUNTRIES CAN SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCE THE OVERALL COST OF EXPORTS AND IMPORTS

AMONG MEMBER STATES. THIS IS ONE WAY OF MAKING GOODS AND SERVICES ORIGINATING FROM COMESA MORE COMPETITIVE AND ATTRACTIVE IN PROMOTING BOTH INTRA AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE. THEREFORE, I CANNOT OVER-EMPHASISE THE NEED FOR FIRST-CLASS TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND ICT INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES IN ALL COMESA MEMBER STATES AND INDEED AFRICA AT LARGE.

AS WE DO SO, WE NEED TO BE MINDFUL THAT AFRICA IS HOME TO THE ONE OF THE LARGEST YOUTHFUL POPULATION GROUPS IN THE WORLD. FURTHER, STUDIES HAVE ALSO SHOWN THAT BY 2050, AFRICA WILL HAVE THE GREATEST GROWTH POTENTIAL IN TERMS OF RESOURCE ENDOWMENT WHICH IS LIKELY TO HELP ACCELERATE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. THIS IS ALSO LIKELY TO INCREASE THE FREE MOVEMENT OF BOTH PEOPLE AND CAPITAL ACROSS BORDERS.

THEREFORE, HARVESTING THE DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND AND THE ECONOMIC GROWTH IN MOST MEMBER COUNTRIES REQUIRE DIGITAL ECONOMIC INTEGRATION AS A MATTER OF PRIORITY. CONSEQUENTLY, THIS MEETING WOULD NOT HAVE COME AT A BETTER TIME THAN NOW SO THAT WE ALL PREPARE OUR PEOPLE, ESPECIALLY THE YOUTHFUL POPULATION FOR A DIGITAL FUTURE.

**HONOURABLE MINISTERS,
DISTINGUISHED DELEGATES,**

I AM PLEASED THAT COMESA IS ALREADY EMBRACING DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY IN DELIVERING ON ITS MANDATE. BASED ON THIS PREMISE, I AM INFORMED THAT COMESA IS WORKING TO ESTABLISH A COMESA DIGITAL FREE TRADE

AREA FOR THE 21 COMESA MEMBER STATES THROUGH E-TRADE, E-LOGISTICS AND E-LEGISLATION. I INVITE MEMBER STATES TO FAST TRACK THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THIS PROGRAMME. WHEN DIGITALISATION IS USED PROFITABLY, IT IMPROVES PRODUCTIVITY, EFFICIENCY AND REDUCES THE COST OF DOING BUSINESS.

THIS IS WHERE THE INDUSTRIAL POLICY AND INDUSTRIAL IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY DEVELOPED BY COMESA BECOMES THE BEDROCK OF DEVELOPMENT IN ALL MEMBER STATES. TO ADDRESS THE INFRASTRUCTURE GAPS WHICH ARE IMPEDING DEVELOPMENT TO TAKE OFF IN MANY COUNTRIES, I AM GLAD TO LEARN THAT THE TRIPARTITE INDUSTRIAL WORK PROGRAMME AS WELL AS THE TRIPARTITE MASTER PLANS FOR TRANSPORT, AND ICT HAVE BEEN ADOPTED BY THE TRIPARTITE COUNCIL. IT REMAINS FOR MEMBER STATES TO SPEED UP THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS.

**HONOURABLE MINISTERS,
DISTINGUISHED DELEGATES,**

AS WE FORGE AHEAD TO THE FUTURE, LET US NOT LEAVE YOUTH, WOMEN AND GIRLS BEHIND AS WE HAVE DONE IN THE PAST. THE TIME HAS COME FOR MALES AND FEMALES TO WORK TOGETHER EVEN MORE IN THE DIGITAL SPACE. TO THIS EFFECT, I URGE MEMBER STATES TO IMPLEMENT THE GENDER POLICY AND YOUTH PROGRAMME; AND TO SIGN THE COMESA SOCIAL CHARTER. LET ME TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO COMMEND MAURITIUS, MALAWI, MADAGASCAR AND SEYCHELLES FOR THE BOLD DECISION TO SIGN THE CHARTER.

I AM ALSO HAPPY TO LEARN THAT COMESA IS PREPARING TO LAUNCH A DIGITAL PLATFORM FOR WOMEN IN BUSINESS, THROUGH ITS **50 MILLION AFRICAN WOMEN SPEAK** PROJECT JOINTLY IMPLEMENTED WITH THE EAST AFRICAN COMMUNITY (ECA) AND THE ECONOMIC COMMUNITY OF WEST AFRICAN STATES (ECOWAS). THIS PLATFORM WILL FURTHER ENHANCE ACCESS TO FINANCE, MARKETS AND RELATED SERVICES FOR WOMEN IN BUSINESS. I URGE COMESA TO WORK WITH ITS PARTNERS TO ENSURE THAT BOTH AFFORDABILITY AND CONNECTIVITY TO THE PLATFORM ARE WITHIN THE REACH OF THE WOMEN IN BUSINESS TARGETED UNDER THE PROJECT.

**HONOURABLE MINISTERS,
DISTINGUISHED DELEGATES,**

THE AFRICA CONTINENTAL FREE TRADE AREA IS COMING INTO FORCE SOON. THEREFORE, BEFORE WE EXPERIENCE THE BENEFITS OF THE CONTINENTAL FREE TRADE AREA, THERE IS NEED TO URGENTLY RATIFY AND IMPLEMENT THE TRIPARTITE FREE TRADE AREA INVOLVING COMESA, ECA AND SADC AS A REGIONAL BLOC. THIS IS A BOLD STEP TOWARDS AFRICA'S COMMITMENT TO ECONOMIC INTEGRATION GIVEN THAT APRIL 2019 IS THE DEADLINE SET BY TRIPARTITE MINISTERS FOR RATIFICATION.

I THEREFORE CALL UPON ALL MEMBER STATES TO ACT NOW, SO THAT ITS ENTRY INTO FORCE IMMEDIATELY PROVIDES US WITH A SINGLE REGIME FOR STANDARDS, CUSTOMS, TRANSIT, SAFEGUARDS, SETTLEMENT OF TRADE DISPUTES, AND ADDRESSING NON-TARIFF BARRIERS.

**HONOURABLE MINISTERS,
DISTINGUISHED DELEGATES,**

AS I CONCLUDE, LET US ALL DRAW INSPIRATION FROM THE CURRENT EFFORTS AND DEVELOPMENTS ON THE CONTINENT BECAUSE AFRICA HAS SHOWN THE WORLD THAT WHEN WE ARE DETERMINED AND FOCUSED, AFRICA CAN ACHIEVE WHAT IS SEEMINGLY IMPOSSIBLE. WE ARE CONVINCED AND CONFIDENT THAT OUR MATCH TOWARDS A PEACEFUL, PROSPEROUS AND INTEGRATED AFRICA IS DRAWING CLOSER EACH DAY THAT PASSES.

WITH THESE REMARKS, IT IS NOW MY SINGULAR HONOUR TO DECLARE THIS EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE COMESA COUNCIL OF MINISTERS, OFFICIALLY OPENED.

I THANK YOU.