



**STATEMENT BY HER EXCELLENCY CHILESHE MPUNDU
KAPWEPWE, SECRETARY GENERAL OF COMESA
DURING THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE 43RD MEETING OF THE
COUNCIL OF MINISTERS**

LUSAKA, ZAMBIA

01 DECEMBER 2022

**Our Guest of Honour, HH Madam WK Mutale Nalumango MP, Vice President of the Republic of Zambia
Chairperson of the COMESA Council of Ministers; HE Mr Ahmed Samir, Minister of Trade & Industry of the Arab Republic of Egypt,
Honourable Ministers Here Present;
Excellencies Permanent Representatives to COMESA;
Excellencies Ambassadors and High Commissioners;
Assistant Secretaries General COMESA Secretariat;
Our Cooperating and Development Partners;
Representatives of International Organizations;
Distinguished Delegates,
Secretariat Staff and
Heads and Officials of COMESA Institutions;
Ladies and Gentlemen.**

Allow me to start by extending a warm welcome to our distinguished Guest of Honour and indeed to all the Honourable Ministers in attendance and all delegations to this Forty Third Meeting of the COMESA Council of Ministers which is the first to be held physically since 2019. This is now possible, following the significant slowdown of the spread of the Covid-19 virus, thanks to the concerted efforts of national, regional, continental and global leaders. It is indeed a welcome relief to meet physically after over 2 years of lockdowns and other restrictions in movement.

**Guest of Honour, Honourable Ministers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is clear that the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic will have a long-lasting impact. However, as we come to terms with the disruptive and negative effects of the pandemic on human life and global economic systems and manage the recovery process, the pandemic taught us lifelong lessons that; first, world economic and social systems are not only integrated but are also fragile and vulnerable to adverse shocks; second, unity of purpose and cooperation in the presence of adversity yields positive results; and third, that technology is indispensable and therefore should be embraced by all.

I am glad to indicate COMESA's contribution towards mitigatory measures against the COVID-19 pandemic. Together with its Tripartite partners, EAC and SADC jointly developed and adopted the Tripartite Guidelines on Trade and Transport Facilitation for the Movement of Persons, Goods and Services during COVID-19 Pandemic, and also developed and deployed on a pilot basis, the Corridor Trip Monitoring System (CTMS) which is an Electronic Surveillance System developed to Monitor Driver Health and Track the Movement of Drivers and Trucks. These initiatives were supported under the Tripartite, Transport and Transit Facilitation Programme (TTTFP) funded by the European Union. These initiatives minimized the COVID -19 induced disruptions to the smooth flow of trade and services. The objective of CTMS in long run is to cater for future pandemic and to allow corridor performance monitoring and facilitating expedited border crossing through the envisaged interface between CTMS and Member States Customs Management Systems.

**Guest of Honour, Honourable Ministers,
Ladies and Gentlemen**

You will be aware that financial resources to support most of our regional programmes are provided by our cooperating partners including the European Union, World Bank, African Development Bank, USAID and some of our COMESA institutions. Without the support of these partners, our programme implementation will be in jeopardy. Allow me therefore, to extend our sincere gratitude for their support.

**Guest of Honour, Honourable Ministers,
Distinguished Invited Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen**

The COMESA MTSP 2021-2025 formulated under your able guidance and adopted at the last COMESA Summit held in Cairo in November 2021 clearly responds to the key dictates of the COMESA Treaty. The Treaty is our compass for programme formulation, implementation and a benchmark for performance evaluation in pursuit of our regional integration agenda. To this end, the COMESA programmes are clustered into the following pillars; Market Integration, Physical Integration/Connectivity, Productive Integration, Gender and Social Integration, and an Effective Secretariat. The pillars are not only in recognition of the diversity of economic and social challenges confronting our region and humanity at large, but also provide a framework for mainstreaming programmes and activities and scope for specialization.

Collectively, the pillars seek to address the following;

- i. Eliminating barriers to mobility by facilitating the flows of goods, services, capital, and people;

- ii. Providing physical connectivity to effectively address supply side constraints related to infrastructure to reduce the cost of doing business in the region and increase competitiveness;
- iii. Enhancing competitiveness of productive capacities and building regional value chains; and
- iv. Fostering gender equality, women empowerment, and supporting youth integration in productive sector.

Let me therefore at this juncture, provide some brief updates on market performance and key achievements in the implementation of our programmes;

**Guest of Honour, Honourable Ministers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Under the market integration pillar, we have continued to implement a number of Trade Facilitation Programmes with notable success including, to mention a few: the Enhanced automated and digitalized customs systems; the Simplified Trade Regime; the online platform for sharing information on essential goods during the covid-19 period; e-Certificate of Origin, implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, the Regional Payment and Settlement System; Regional Customs Transit Guarantee (RCTG) and the Yellow Card scheme.

I am glad to report that COMESA Yellow Card Scheme has expanded its reach to Mozambique, South Africa, Botswana and South Sudan; thereby facilitating the smooth movement of vehicles, goods and persons

between COMESA and other regions. I am also happy to inform you that the African Export-Import Bank (AFREXIMBANK) has joined COMESA RCTG carnet and will play a key role in promoting it as a Continental Customs Bond to facilitate Intra-Africa Trade.

Guest of Honour, Honourable Ministers,

As the biggest Regional Economic Community on the continent, COMESA plays a leading role in supporting continental integration efforts through its various Institutions such as ZEP-Re, African Leather Products and Leather Institute, African Trade Insurance and Trade Development Bank, the COMESA Court of Justice among others. Its footprint is evident in a number of areas where some of its instruments have been adopted and successfully applied in other regions at continental level. Other areas covered by COMESA Institutions include regional investment, energy sector regulation, competition and consumer protection, monetary policy and regional payment systems and women in business.

COMESA was instrumental in the establishment of the Tripartite Free Trade Area and continues to play a key role towards convergence of regional trade policies through accelerated harmonization and standardization in view of challenges occasioned by overlapping membership. The Tripartite Committees responsible for market integration, infrastructure development and industrial development pillars have respectively pursued the harmonization and standardization of integration in the Tripartite region. The birth of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) benefited significantly from some key Tripartite FTA legal instruments.

**Guest of Honour, Honourable Ministers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Industrial development remains at the heart of COMESA's integration agenda. COMESA has continued the implementation of the Industrialization Policy (2015-2030) and the attendant Strategy (2017-2026). This is in recognition that increased production capacities of goods and services is critical for the region's intra-regional trade. In view of this, COMESA developed guidelines for sustainable and inclusive industrial production, implementation strategy of the COMESA local content policy framework and the COMESA framework for managing industrial parks and Special Economic Zones.

Private sector development with a particular focus on SMEs including women and youth entrepreneurs remained our area of focus. In this regard, COMESA has in place a Regional Enterprise Competitiveness and Access to Markets Programme (RECAMP) financed by the European Union which aims at contributing towards the deepening of COMESA regional integration through increasing competitiveness and market access of private sector in regional and global value chains focusing on Horticulture, Agro-processing and Leather industry.

**Guest of Hounor, Honourable Ministers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

On the gender and women empowerment front, various capacity building initiatives were undertaken targeting professionals at Secretariat, COMESA Institutions and Member States to enhance awareness and application of tools on gender mainstreaming. In addition, COMESA continued to implement initiatives on empowerment of women and youth, such as the digital platform for women in business which attracted about 350,000 users, and the youth engagement in democratic governance and socio-economic processes. These initiatives have enabled women and youth to access business information, network and share experiences, as well as contribute to democratic governance in their localities.

In line with the Council decision made in November 2021, the first meeting of COMESA Ministers of health was organised in June 2022. The Ministers of Health made some key decisions including the decision for Secretariat to establish the Health Desk, and for the Committee on Administration and Budget to allocate financial resources for that purpose. Further, the Ministers made decisions related to the strengthening of the pharmaceutical sector and sharing of good practices in the region.

Guest of Honour, Honourable Ministers,

Infrastructure development is one of the key priorities on the COMESA agenda deserving special attention. I am glad to inform you that COMESA and the World Bank signed a financing agreement for the implementation of a Regional Infrastructure Finance Facility (RIFF) project. The project has three components;

- Project and Infrastructure Finance Facility - a (US\$325million) credit line to provide long-term finance to project finance and infrastructure sub-projects that meet development impact criteria and is being administered by the Trade and Development Bank (TDB);
- COVID Infrastructure Sector SME Response (US\$75 million) being administered by TDB,
- and Technical Assistance (US\$25 million) to COMESA and TDB.

The COMESA component will support the enabling environment for private infrastructure finance with a focus on building a regional off-grid energy market. I wish to urge Member States to access this funding facility to augment national resources to meet competing national priorities.

In terms of policy and regulatory harmonization, and institutional connectivity, COMESA is the Lead Regional Economic Community in the implementation of the Support to the Air Transport Sector Development and the Enhancement of Governance and Enabling Environment in the ICT sector (EGEE-ICT) programs in the Eastern and Southern Africa funded by the European Union. These two programs will contribute positively to the aviation and ICT sectors in the region and deepen regional integration. In addition, COMESA pioneered and continues to support establishment of the One-Stop Border Post trade facilitation instrument which has significantly contributed to the reduction of delays at border stations and has been replicated throughout the Sub-Saharan Africa region.

**Guest of Honour, Honourable Ministers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

We have made significant strides on a number of priority areas which can serve as a springboard to propel us to greater heights. We remain focused on our mandate and resolute towards the achievement of our objectives. Notwithstanding the challenges we may encounter, we believe that great sailors emerge from rough seas. As I conclude, let me wish you fruitful deliberations and look forward to your guidance on how to accelerate our regional integration agenda.

I thank you for your attention.