



**STATEMENT BY**

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**COMESA SECRETARY GENERAL**

**AT THE OPENING OF THE TENTH COMESA ANNUAL RESEARCH FORUM**

***11 September 2023***

***Virtual Meeting***

**Assistant Secretary General, Organization of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS)**

**Representatives of the World Bank, EU, NEPAD, ACBF, UNECA, UNCTAD, AFREXIM Bank, UNDP and International Organizations present**

**Eminent Scholars, Researchers and Lecturers**

**Presenters and Discussants of Various Research Papers**

**All Invited Guests**

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my honor and privilege to have this opportunity to say a few words at the opening of the Tenth COMESA Annual Research Forum. I would like to start by welcoming you all and expressing my profound gratitude to the keynote speakers, authors, researchers and experts for taking time to contribute to this important forum.

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

COMESA Research Forum is one of our key avenues through which the Secretariat harnesses knowledge and policy insights from eminent scholars, researchers, academics and policy makers.

The theme of the Tenth Annual Research Forum is “**30 Years of COMESA Regional Integration: Retrospect and Prospects.**” This theme draws its relevance from the fact that COMESA has been in operation in the last 30

years. It is therefore important to take stock of COMESA's regional integration journey, its achievements, its challenges and the prospects for promotion of further regional economic integration as an instrument for sustainable economic growth and development. In line with our tradition, this year's research papers address topical areas and emerging development issues like the circular economy, digitalization, transport and connectivity issues which are essential for effective regional economic integration.

### **Distinguished Participants**

Allow me to briefly highlight some important milestones of COMESA over the years. COMESA was established in 1981 as a Preferential Trade Area. The treaty establishing COMESA was signed on November 1993 in Kampala, Uganda and ratified in 1994. The transition of the PTA into COMESA was not so much a change of philosophy but rather an evolution with a view to increase its functional efficiency. Given that COMESA morphed from the PTA, its objectives are broadly similar, albeit with some modifications. The PTA's main goal was to take advantage of its larger market size, capitalize on the region's common heritage and allow for greater social and economic cooperation. In essence, COMESA was established with the main aim of promoting regional integration through trade and the development of natural and human resources for the mutual benefit of all people in the region.

COMESA marked an important milestone in October 2000 when nine Member States, namely; Djibouti, Egypt, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Sudan, Zambia and Zimbabwe established a Free Trade Area (FTA) amongst themselves. This number has since risen to sixteen with the

Republic of Tunisia being the latest to join in 2019. The FTA was launched to provide Member States with duty free and quota free market access of COMESA's originating, qualifying products.

So far, COMESA has made significant achievements in regional integration. For example, intra-COMESA exports increased from US\$1.5 billion in 2000 to US\$12.8 billion in 2021. Despite this growth, intra-COMESA exports remain low at about 9 percent of its total exports. Recent studies indicate that inter-COMESA export potential is in excess of US\$100 billion. A lot more work is therefore required to unlock our potential and enable Member States to better utilize the preferences embedded in the Free Trade Area regime.

Another unique feature of the Treaty is the establishment of institutions to support the implementation of various integration schemes. These include, among others, the Trade and Development Bank, COMESA Competition Commission, the African Trade Insurance Agency, COMESA Re-Insurance Institution (ZeP-Re), COMESA Business Council, COMESA Federation of Associations for Women in Business and COMESA Clearing House. These institutions provide trade-related services in the COMESA region and beyond, hence anchoring integration in the region and the continent on a firm footing.

In addition, COMESA has established several trade facilitation instruments especially those focusing on simplification of administrative processes under the COMESA Free Trade Area, automation of customs operations, upgrading the operational efficiency at border posts, digitalization of

processes and strengthened structures for coordination, monitoring and resolution of non-tariff barriers to trade. These instruments include: COMESA Yellow Card, COMESA Simplified Trade Regime, the Regional Customs Transit Guarantee Scheme – RCTG-CARNET and the Green Pass facilitating adherence to implementation of sanitary and phytosanitary measures for some agricultural products.

### **Distinguished Participants**

As you are all aware, the recent *Africa Climate Summit* in Nairobi opened a new chapter for Africa to chart a new course of climate action. Indeed, solutions for sustainable growth and elevating people out of poverty lie with us here in Africa. We at COMESA believe that all regional, continental and international stakeholders should work in tandem to implement these solutions.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen**

COMESA continues to participate actively in pan-African integration efforts, including the RECs Coordination Committee chaired by the AfCFTA Secretariat. Some of our programmes like the One-Stop Border Posts, the Simplified Trade Regime, the Customs Transit Guarantee Carnet and more recently the COMESA Virtual Master's Degree Programme in Regional Integration are all being scaled up beyond the COMESA region.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen**

I am confident that the knowledge and policy insights that will be shared during this forum will go a long way towards informing the formulation and implementation of sound trade and regional integration strategies, policies and programmes.

As I conclude my remarks, allow me to, once again, extend special thanks and recognition to the Organization of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) and the European Union (EU) for supporting our research forums during the years 2019-2022. In the same vein, I wish to thank the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) for supporting our research forums during the years 2014-2017.

Finally, and certainly not least, I wish to express my sincere appreciation and gratitude to all the authors, discussants, researchers, professionals, mentors and policy-makers for taking the time off their busy schedule to contribute to this Forum. I believe you will make important contributions towards enhancing evidence-based policy making as well as building the capacity of our young researchers.

I wish you very fruitful deliberations.

**I thank you for your kind attention.**