

## New COMESA Chairperson outlines priorities

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President Andry Rajoelina (L) hands over COMESA flag to President Abdel Fattah El Sisi

Egypt is the new Chair of COMESA after taking over from Madagascar, which has been steering the organization since 2016. President Abdel Fattah El Sisi took over from President Andry Rajoelina of Madagascar during the 21st Summit of the COMESA Authority of Heads of State and Governments on 23rd November in Cairo, Egypt.

Heads of State and their representatives attended the Summit physically and virtually.

Soon after, President El-Sisi outlined his areas of focus during his tenure as the Chair of COMESA, which are also aligned with the COMESA Medium Term Strategic Plan for 2021 – 2025. The MTSP was launched at the Summit.

His focus, he said will be on achieving regional economic integration by working towards

elimination of barriers to regional trade and promoting industrialization to increase productivity in the region.

"Egypt firmly believes in the importance of regional and continental integration and constantly seeks to develop intra-trade within this integration," the president said.

He also identified infrastructure development particularly transport, energy, information, communication technology as his priority. Besides, encouraging the flow of investments in the region, promoting regional integration in the health sector would also be top on his agenda.

During his tenure as chair, he will also focus on creating a conducive business environment, particularly initiatives targeting digital transformation and financial inclusion to serve

small- and medium-sized companies. President El Sisi commended his predecessor, President Rajoelina, for the concrete achievements realized to strengthen regional economic integration. President Rajoelina was chairperson of COMESA for three years, out of the cumulative five years that Madagascar was at the helm of the regional bloc.

In his address, President Rajoelina said digital transformation has been a key plank in his tenure. Specifically, he said digital trade had proven critical during the COVID-19 pandemic and thanked the COMESA Secretariat for coming up with digital solutions such as online platforms to facilitate trade.

Nonetheless, he said the major challenge to regional integration remains funding.

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## Leaders urge for up-scaling investments in health



COMESA Heads of State urged Member States to scale up investment in research and innovation in the health sector and to prioritize all programmes that would enhance socio-economic recovery and generate more resilient societies that are ready to respond to disasters that may come.

In their Communique issued at the end of their 21st COMESA Summit, the leaders noted the devastating socio-economic and cultural effects of the COVID-19 pandemic across various sectors of the economy and the low vaccine production and access in the region.

They urged Member States to invest in digital infrastructure to enhance universal access to internet to address the challenges arising from the digital divide and support the digitalization of the economies.

The focus on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and way forward, is in line with the theme of the COMESA Summit: Building Resilience Through Strategic Digital Economic Integration, which advocates for the application of ICT solutions in driving regional integration forward.

They commended Egypt, Rwanda, Uganda and other Member States that are taking initiatives for vaccine production and called for the fair global distribution of vaccines particularly for Africa.

Further, the Heads of State endorsed the establishment of a Multi-Sectoral Technical Committee on health matters to coordinate and support regional programmes on health-related matters at the COMESA Secretariat. This is in line with Article 110 of the COMESA Treaty on Cooperation of Member States on Health Matters.

## Fresh call to ratify the COMESA-EAC-SADC tripartite agreement

COMESA Heads of State have made a fresh call to Member States that are yet to ratify the tripartite Free Trade Agreement to do so to enable it to enter into force. So far the agreement requires three ratifications to attain the 14 required for its implementation.

The leaders recalled that the tripartite COMESA-EAC-SADC Tripartite Free Trade Area (TFTA) Agreement was launched six years ago, in June 2015 in Sharm-El-Sheikh, Egypt.

They recognized the importance of the Tripartite Agreement in resolving the challenges of multiple memberships in the three RECs and of championing and expediting continental integration process.

They noted that 11 Tripartite Member/Partner States have submitted instruments of ratification including Botswana, Burundi, Egypt, Eswatini, Kenya, Namibia, Rwanda, South Africa, Uganda,

Zambia and Zimbabwe.

The objective of the COMESA-EAC-SADC Tripartite group is to strengthen economic integration of the southern and eastern Africa region through joint planning, design, coordination, and implementation of policies and programmes across the three blocs. The focus areas are trade, customs and infrastructure development, and industrialization. The Tripartite also provides a platform to address the overlapping memberships of countries to the three RECs.

Early this year, Ministers from the tripartite group set June 2021 as the deadline to achieve the threshold of 14 ratifications required for the Tripartite Free Trade Area (TFTA) agreement to enter into force. This was missed, hence the fresh call by Heads of State is a welcome intervention.

## New COMESA Chairperson...

"If we really want COMESA to become an effective tool of development, we have to think of better alternatives of financing opportunities," he said.

The 2021 Summit themed "Building Resilience Through Strategic Digital Economic Integration" comes three years since the last was hosted by the COMESA Secretariat in Lusaka, Zambia, on 18 - 19 July 2018. Egypt last hosted the COMESA Summit two decades ago, in 2001.

Heads of State who participated and addressed the Summit were; President Evariste Ndayishimiye, (Burundi), Pres. Kais Saied (Tunisia), Pres. Mohamed Younes al-Menfi, (Libyan Presidential Council), Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth (Mauritius), Pres. Wavel Ramkalawan (Seychelles), Pres. Mohamed Abdullahi (Somalia) and Pres. Paul Kagame (Rwanda). Three Vice Presidents; Malawi, Uganda and Zambia and two ministers from Kenya and D R Congo represented their heads of State and addressed the Summit.

The leaders called for adoption of digital technologies, harmonization and adoption of policies that promote the creation of such systems in various sectors. They further, stressed the need to develop green economies in the region to cushion the impact of climate change. They commended the COMESA Secretariat for implementing innovative systems such as the digital online platform to facilitate trade amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

In her address to the Summit, Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe said that, owing to the COVID-19, the COMESA region's average growth had slowed to 0.6% in 2020 down from 5.2% in 2019 and 6.0% in 2018.

"It is my hope that renewed commitment will address the challenges faced by COMESA, which include amongst others, slow ratification and domestication of legal instruments, delayed implementation of the Decisions by the Authority and the Council of Ministers," she said.

Other leaders that spoke at the Summit were the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, the World Bank Director for Regional Integration, Africa, Middle East and North Africa Regions, Ms. Boutheina Guerhazi, and the African Development Bank President, Dr Akinwumi Adesina.



# Leaders welcome the **restoration** of civilian rule in Sudan

COMESA Heads of State have welcomed the Agreement of November 21, 2021, to reinstate Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok to office and the restoration of civilian rule in Sudan.

In their communique issued at the closing of their 21st Summit in Cairo, the leaders urged that every effort be made to lead Sudan towards close adherence to the timelines of the Transition.

The leaders reiterated the importance of peace, security and stability for creating an enabling environment for investment, sustained economic development and a viable integration for the region.

They encouraged the political leaders in Sudan to expedite the creation of a unified army as

well as the drafting of a new constitution that will, among other things, outline the partnership between civilian and military in the transition government.

The Summit welcomed the other elements of the November 2021 Agreement on Sudan including the restoration of the Council of Ministers and the release of political detainees

On Libya, the leaders lauded the signing of the October 2020 Ceasefire Agreement and commended the stakeholders on their commitment to the attainment of lasting peace in the country. They welcomed the roadmap developed by the Libya Political Dialogue Forum towards free, fair, and inclusive presidential election on 24th December 2021 and called on all

the parties to redouble their efforts to ensure that the elections are held on schedule.

The Heads of State called on all Member States to respect the Ceasefire Agreement and to fully comply with the Arms Embargo; and reiterated its call for the withdrawal of all foreign forces and mercenaries from all Libyan territory, land, sea, and air, without delay.

They noted that the problem of illegal immigration places a lot of pressure on Libya as a transit state and emphasized that the problem requires a political solution for its resolution.

They are called on the European Union and COMESA Member States to support social economic programmes particularly for the youth.

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## New Judge, Commissioners sworn in

Justice Salohy Norotiana Rakotondrajery Randrianarisoa of Madagascar has been sworn-in as one of the five judges of the Appellate Division of the COMESA Court. Justice Randrianarisoa, a Senior Judge and Director General of Judicial Affairs, Research and Reforms at the Ministry of Justice in Madagascar replaces the late Justice Abdalla El Bashir from Sudan, who passed on in February 2020.

She was virtually sworn in during the 21st COMESA Heads of State and Government held in Cairo, Egypt on Tuesday 23rd November 2021.

Four new Commissioners for the COMESA Competition Commission have been sworn in to serve for a period of four years. These are Mr. Mahmoud Momtaz from Egypt, Mr. Mesganu Arga Moach (Ethiopia) Mr. Lloyds Vincent Nkhoma

(Malawi) and Ms. Beatrice Uwumukiza (Rwanda). The Commissioners were appointed by the 41st COMESA Council of Ministers Meeting held on 26 November 2020 for a three-year period from 15 - July 2021 to 14 July 2024.

Others sworn-in were three members of the COMESA Committee of Elders. They are Mrs. Hasna Barkat Daoud from Djibouti, Ambassador Mohamed Ashraf Gamal Rashed from Egypt and Mme Monique Andreas Esoavelomandroso of Madagascar.

The Committee of Elders was established by the COMESA Heads of State in 2006 to complement peace-making and peace-building capacity of the Office of COMESA Secretary General under the COMESA Governance Peace and Security Programme. Among its key activities is leading



Justice Salohy Norotiana Rakotondrajery Randrianarisoa

the COMESA Elections Observation Missions in Member States.

## COMESA trade fairs to make comeback

The Summit has endorsed the revival of the COMESA Trade Fairs to exploit the trade potential of the region. At the same, it re-emphasised the important role played by the private sector in enhancing regional integration. The objective of the trade fairs is to provide opportunities for businesses in the COMESA region to showcase their products and services and demonstrate their potential, to facilitate business linkages, partnership and joint ventures.

The initiative by the COMESA Business Council, was earlier last month, presented and adopted by the COMESA Council of Ministers to promote

intra- trade within the COMESA region, through trade and investment.

The Trade Fair will be structured in two major activities: exhibition and conference. Participating Member States and corporates will set up pavilions and exhibition booths to showcase their goods and services.

The conference dubbed "COMESA Taste for Africa Conference" will run alongside the expo and will address topical issues relating to trade finance, payments, trade facilitation, trade-enabling infrastructure, harmonisation of trade standards and regional value chains.

At the Council meeting conducted on 9th November 2021, Egypt indicated it would explore the possibility of hosting the first Intra-COMESA Trade Fair during the first half of 2022. Hence, the Council decided that COMESA Secretariat and CBC in collaboration with Member States mobilize resources to organize the Trade Fair, which will be held every two years..

With the endorsement of the Heads of State, the resumption of the trade expo is expected to make a comeback after more than a decade.



## COMESA annual report 2020 is launched



New COMESA Chair, President Abdel Fattah El Sisi (L) receives COMESA Annual Report from outgoing Chair President Andry Rajoelina.

Outgoing chairperson of COMESA, President Andry Rajoelina launched the 2020 COMESA Annual report which he handed over to his successor President Fattah El Sisi. The report outlines the achievements during the past year, which was characterized by the COVID-19 Pandemic and its aftermath.

During the period, COMESA region recorded a negative macroeconomic growth shrinking by negative 5.4 percentage points to 0.2%, from 5.6% in 2019. Resultant COVID-19 response measures that included lockdowns, travel restrictions, border closures, constrained external financing following capital outflows and sharp declines in capital inflows and remittance are some of the factors that affected growth.

In addition, the impact of multiple shocks, particularly the effects of floods, locust invasion and collapse of commodity prices have also contributed to the negative growth. However, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in April 2021 projections showed that the COMESA region average growth will rebound to 4.3% in 2021 and further to 6.0% in 2022. This recovery in growth forecast in the region is being anchored on several factors including optimism about a recovery in advanced economies, driven in large part by scale up of

vaccination efforts against COVID-19, and the extraordinary level of policy support - fiscal stimulus and continued accommodation by central banks.

The recovery in commodity prices and firm worldwide demand particularly in China and broadly accommodative global financial conditions, given low global interest rates and spreads are expected to boost the economies.

The report indicates that the immediate challenge for most countries in the region is stopping the COVID-19 pandemic and saving lives by among others, quality spending to strengthen local health systems and containment efforts and enhancing the roll out and uptake of the COVID-19 vaccine.

Other interventions, include measures to support speedy recovery of economies, reign on the threatening debt levels and in the medium term, ensure structural transformation and economic diversification of individual economies. Leveraging on African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) to strengthen value-addition and industrial growth and to increase the role of digitization, will be important steps in the right direction.

## COMESA's five-year blueprint launched

The COMESA Medium-Term Strategic Plan 2021-2025 (MTSP) was launched at the 21st COMESA Summit in Cairo.

The new strategy recognizes the socio-economic adverse impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on COMESA's integration agenda and incorporates policy interventions required as economies enter the successive phases of crisis-response, recovery and building of resilience.

The plan has four strategic pillars: market integration; physical integration/ connectivity; productive integration and gender and social integration.

The Strategic Plan will serve as a useful tool to engage COMESA's strategic partners in the pursuit of regional integration and provide a framework by which detailed annual work programmes and budgets will be developed.

## Summit adopts measures to enhance youth involvement

The Summit endorsed the establishment of the COMESA Youth Advisory Panel to foster engagement of the youth in policy dialogue. The Panel will be a consultative regional body on youth related matters which have the mandate to bridge the gap between the young people and the decision-makers at both regional and Member States levels.

Members of the panel will contribute to the decision-making processes in the region on youth participation in democratic governance and socio-economic development processes. The panel is one of the forums and instruments developed to harness the potential for young people to strengthen and grow the continent's economies.

The initiative is part of the activities under the COMESA gender and social affairs programme.

The Summit also endorsed the COMESA Gender Policy Implementation Plan to strengthen gender mainstreaming at all levels. It commended Eswatini, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius and Seychelles on the signing of the Social Charter and urged Member States that have not yet signed to do so.



## Journalists, innovators recognized at Summit



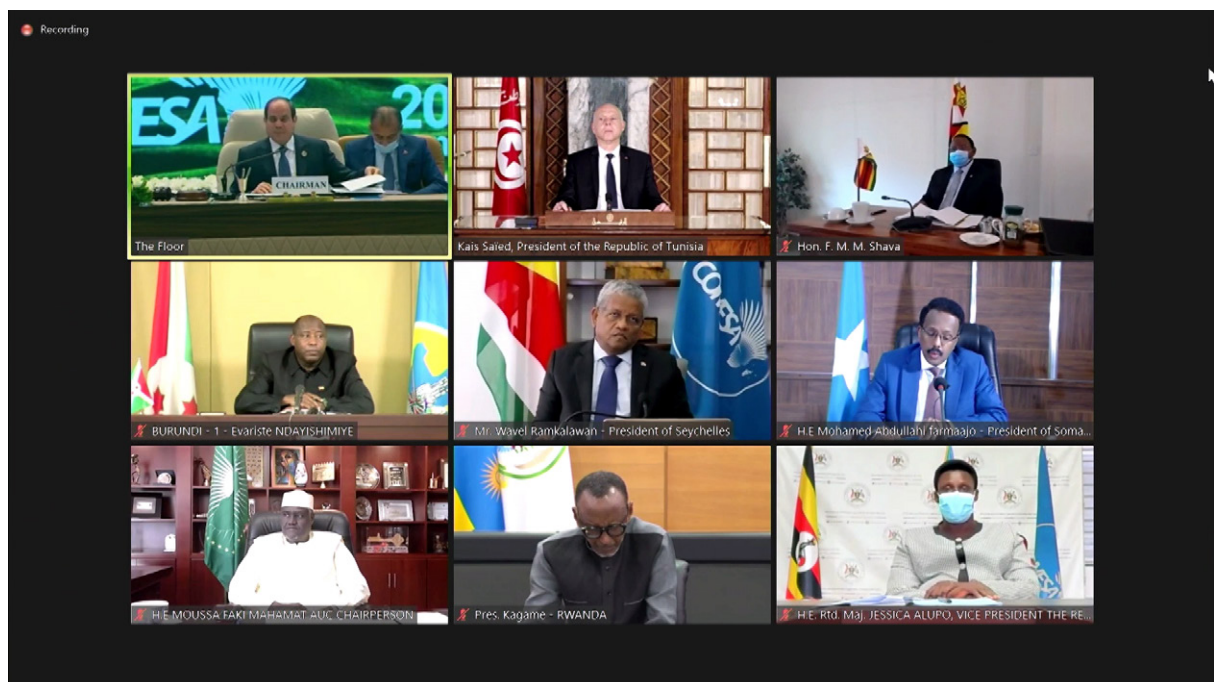
Banda, Zambia National Information Service (ZANIS); Mr. Prosper Ndhlovu; Chronicle Newspaper, Zimbabwe; Ms. Georgia Chirombo, Malawi Institute of Journalism; Mr. Fulgence Niyonagize, Rwanda; Ms. Sarah Mawerere, Uganda Broadcasting Corporation and Mr. Mohamed Lotfy Yahia, National Media Authority, Egypt.

Equally recognized were two innovation award winners; Billy Munyenembe of Zambia and Mr. Vinay Kanhye of Mauritius. Billy, a Zambian university student was recognized for developing Medicine Dispenser designed to help people access medical assistance at any time through a software. Vinay from Mauritius was equally recognized for developing new products from the Moringa plant.

Eight journalists that have won the COMESA media awards since 2019 received recognition by COMESA Heads of State at the Summit.

These are; Ms. Mona Sewilam, ON Live – Television, Egypt; Mr. Moses Havyarimana, Burundi National Radio; Mr. Chimangeni

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## Record attendance at the 21st Summit

The 21st COMESA in Egypt was attended by nine Heads of State and governments, the highest in recent times. They included the host President Abdel Fattah El Sisi, Pres. Evariste Ndayishimiye, (Burundi), Pres. Andry Rajoelina (Madagascar) Pres. Mohamed Younes al-Menfi, (Libyan Presidential Council), Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth (Mauritius), Pres. Paul Kagame (Rwanda), Pres. Wavel Ramkalawan (Seychelles), Pres. Mohamed Abdullahi (Somalia)

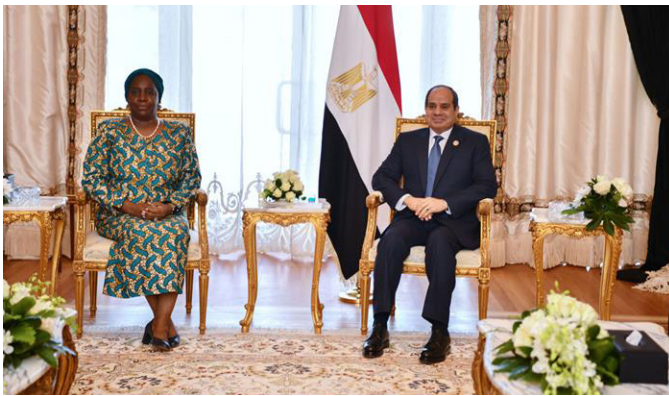
and Pres. Kais Saied (Tunisia).

In the previous Summits, three heads of State attended the 20th and 19th Summits (2018 and 2016) and seven each at the 18th and 17th Summits in 2015 and 2014 respectively. These Summits were, however, fully physical.

At the Summit in Egypt, three Vice-Presidents attended and presented statement on behalf

of their respective Heads of State. They were Mr Saulos Chilima, (Malawi) Madam Jessica Alupo (Uganda) and Madam Mutale Nalumango of Zambia. The DR Congo President, who is the Chair of the African Union, was represented by Amb. Didier Mazenga Mukanzu, Minister of Regional Cooperation while the President of Kenya, who is the chairperson of the East African Community was represented by Treasury Cabinet Secretary, Amb. Ukur Yatani.









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