



STATEMENT BY

**CHILESHE MPUNDU KAPWEPWE
COMESA SECRETARY GENERAL**

**DURING THE OPENING OF THE 41st MEETING OF THE
INTERGOVERNMENTAL COMMITTEE**

**CONDUCTED VIA VIDEO CONFERENCING
23-24 NOVEMBER 2020**

Distinguished Delegates from COMESA Member States;
Your Excellency's Ambassadors and High Commissioners;
Representatives of COMESA Institutions;
Distinguished Representatives of Regional Economic Communities;
Representatives of International Organisations;
Officials of the Secretariat;
Ladies and Gentlemen;

A warm welcome to all our meeting delegates. I would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude for your enduring support and commitment to COMESA's integration agenda throughout the years. This meeting is being held to recalibrate our regional priorities.

A year ago we met to celebrate our successes, discuss our challenges and brainstorm on the possible solutions for corrective action. The year 2020 has been an eventful year for Africa and the entire world owing to the COVID-19 pandemic which has resulted in a global health and economic crisis that puts at risk the achievements we have made thus far.

As the region implements economic recovery strategies, there is need to shift our efforts towards adapting and creating solutions for business in a post COVID-19 era. Mitigating the effects of the pandemic requires innovation, collective efforts and mobilization of additional resources to effectively address our regional and continental challenges. In this regard one of the issues that will be discussed and considered today, is how our Member States can move forward during this time. As we plan for our future, let us

make sure that we make informed decisions. Indeed, we are a resilient region and respond to challenges in solidarity and harmony.

It is in our interest that we collaborate towards developing sustainable solutions for the benefit of the region's citizens and generations to come.

Having said this, the COVID-19 pandemic has immensely affected the implementation of our 2020 Work Programme which prompted the postponement of a number of programme activities and the fast tracking of virtual engagements for the most part of the remaining year. Nevertheless, I am proud to say that the Secretariat established new and innovative ways of conducting our operations. Our institutional capabilities and operational procedures have allowed us to remain operational during these challenging times. It is also commendable that Member States also rose to the occasion and put in place measures to ensure safety of our people and continued facilitation of trade and investments.

Excellencies; Ladies and Gentlemen,

Trade Facilitation continues to be a key focus area for COMESA's integration agenda as we recognise the importance of an environment in which there is a seamless flow of goods, people, services and capital across our borders. Under the guidance of the 2016-2020 COMESA Medium Term Strategic Plan, remarkable progress has been recorded in our region. Under trade liberalization and market integration programmes, significant progress has been made in implementing trade facilitation instruments, especially those focusing on automation of customs operations and digitalization of processes and procedures, simplification of cross-border trade to support

women and small-scale traders and monitoring and addressing non-tariff barriers to trade.

In addition, there is renewed attention towards deepening liberalization of the services sectors by Member States as evident by steps towards concluding negotiations of all the identified seven priority sectors.

Liberalization of services presents an opportunity to mainstream services in national development and diversification of production and exports in the COMESA region. It is our belief that part of the reasons for the depressed intra-COMESA trade is due to prevailing restrictions in various services sectors.

We therefore encourage Member States to focus more attention on capacity building in services sectors in order to conclude ongoing negotiation in services. As Secretariat, we shall continue to provide the necessary support required to speed up these negotiations and in that regard lined up a number of capacity building initiatives targeting negotiators and services providers.

We also remain on course in ensuring that our integration policies remain relevant and guided by evidence-based research and analysis. To this end, the theme of this year's 7th Annual Research Forum held on 19 – 21 October 2020 was *“Harnessing Intra-COMESA Trade through the Interface with African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)”*.

It is also worth noting that in an effort to minimize the disruption to cross-border trade in goods and services during the COVID-19 period, Secretariat developed Guidelines for the Movement of Goods and Services across the COMESA Region which were adopted by Council in May 2020. Additionally,

we have developed an online portal for information exchange on production and availability of essential products within the region and we have also undertaken a study on the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 in COMESA member States following a Council directive.

At regional level, COMESA has been instrumental in providing leadership in facilitating negotiations for the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) which came into force on 30th May 2019.

To date, most Articles of the CFTA have been agreed on as well as the Annexes. Additionally, COMESA continued to support negotiations on implementation of the Tripartite Free Trade Area (TFTA) in partnership with SADC and EAC.

COVID-19 is projected to continue negatively affecting agricultural production in our region and escalate the threats of food insecurity. With most of our economies being agriculture based, early interventions to reduce the eminent threats are urgently required. In this case, Ministers responsible for agriculture, environment and natural resources gathered and adopted the COMESA COVID-19 Food Security Response Plan to help the region deal with the impacts of COVID-19 on regional food security.

COMESA recognizes that agriculture remains an important sector in sustaining most economies of Member States. We have continued to be a major partner in the implementation of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) with support rendered to Member States through provision of technical assistance and building capacities in the CAADP processes, including evidence-based planning, implementation and

monitoring of the national agriculture and food security investment plans, strategies and programmes.

Excellencies; Ladies and Gentlemen,

COMESA has played a prominent role in promoting infrastructural development in the region. You will agree with me that economic infrastructure development is critical for building productive capacities, lowering production costs and ultimately, fostering sustained economic inclusive growth and human development in the region.

COMESA remains committed to the development of regional transport corridors made up of routes that link the region's seaports to major inland markets as well as offer connections to its many landlocked countries. It is envisioned that geographical barriers will no longer be a hindrance to trade in the region and advancements of this nature enable physical connectivity and integration.

You will be pleased to note that efforts at the Tripartite Level to facilitate trade and transport of goods and services across the region during the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the adoption of the Harmonised Tripartite Guidelines on Trade and Transport Facilitation Guidelines for Safe, Efficient and Cost-Effective Movement of Goods and Services during the COVID-19 Pandemic. We call upon you as Member States to continue implementing these guidelines in order to ensure smooth flow of goods and services across our region.

Regional integration supports the strengthening of our productive and manufacturing sectors. As a region, we recognise that industrial development and industrialization are at the heart of COMESA's developmental agenda, with important linkages to technological enhancement, value-addition, diversification, job creation and poverty reduction. With this in mind, COMESA will aim to ensure that the objectives of the Regional Enterprise Competitiveness and Access to Markets Programme (RECAMP) under the 11th EDF now under implementation are met.

Excellencies; Ladies and Gentlemen

COMESA's integration agenda aims to improve the living standards of our citizens; and this calls for people-centered regional development interventions that take into consideration values of social justice including inclusiveness, participation and sustainability. During the period, COMESA put significant effort in contributing to the empowerment of women through enhanced access to information and networking opportunities in the region via the 50 Million African Women Speak Digital Platform.

I am pleased to report, that virtual launches of the platform have been held in a number of Member States to raise awareness of the platform and enhance reach to users. More than ever, there is need for women to embrace digital approaches as one of the ways to ensure their businesses survive the COVID-19 Pandemic. Concerning empowerment of the youth, work is ongoing to implement the Youth Engagement in Governance, Democracy and Socio-Economic Processes Project aimed at improving the participation of youth in democratic governance and socio-economic processes.

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen;

COMESA programmes continue to be guided by the Treaty, Medium Term Strategic Plans and Summit and Council Decisions. As our 2016-2020 COMESA Medium Term Strategic Plan (MTSP) comes to an end in December, the year 2020 was dedicated to the strategy formulation process of the 2021-2025 COMESA Medium Term Strategic Plan.

This process was undertaken to facilitate the development of the new strategy which used a wide consultative approach with key stakeholders internally and externally. Consultations were undertaken at different levels including African Union Commission under Agenda 2063, partner RECs, SDG Centre for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), UNECA, and the World Bank amongst others to gather information for the upcoming strategy. As a result, alignment has been established at the global, continental, regional and subject specific levels.

The 2021-2025 MTSP identifies 4 key strategic pillars namely; Market Integration, Physical Integration/Connectivity, Productive Integration and Gender and Social Integration. The pillars support COMESA's mission to facilitate the achievement sustainable economic and social progress in Member States through increased co-operation and integration in all fields of development particularly in trade, customs and monetary affairs, transport, communication and information technology, industry and energy, gender, agriculture, environment and natural resources and peace and security.

The identified pillars are supported by a strategic focus aimed at establishing an Effective Secretariat, by building institutional capacity through adequate human resources and financial resources creating synergy to feed into the pillars. To support effective monitoring and evaluation of the Strategy critical for learning through feedback, a corresponding M&E Framework with appropriate indicators has been developed.

Distinguished Delegates; Ladies and Gentlemen;

Allow me to highlight some of the key items contained in your agenda. First, is the COMESA 2021-2025 Medium Term Strategic, which will be followed by reports by various COMESA Institutions. You will also deliberate on Reports on the Status of Implementation of COMESA programs, including the Report of the Committee on Statistical Matters; the Report of the Committee on Trade and Customs Matters and the Status Reports on other COMESA Programmes (Gender, Infrastructure etc.). In addition, the Reports of Sectoral Ministerial Meetings will be presented for noting. As I come to the end of my statement, I look forward to fruitful deliberations and recommendations that aim to uphold COMESA's goals and objectives.

I thank you all for your attention