



**REMARKS BY THE NATIONAL COHESION AND INTEGRATION COMMISSION  
CHAIRPERSON REV. DR. SAMUEL KOBIA DURING THE TRAINING TO  
SUPPORT KENYA STAKEHOLDERS ON COMESA'S SVA/ AU CSVRA  
PROCESSES AT CHRISMAR HOTEL ON 17<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2021.**

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- ***The Secretary General of COMESA;***
- ***Members of the COMESA Secretariat;***
- ***Representatives of the African Union;***
- ***Representatives of the Zambian Government;***
- ***Members of the National Assembly Committee on National Cohesion and Equality of Opportunity;***
- ***Members of the Kenyan High Commission in Zambia;***
- ***Representatives of Kenya's Ministry of Foreign Affairs;***
- ***Representatives of Save the Children;***
- ***My colleagues at the National Cohesion and Integration Commission;***
- ***Ladies and Gentlemen;***

It gives me a great pleasure to see all of us here. I am very happy that this meeting has finally come to fruition after lengthy bilateral arrangements between COMESA and the Commission. This is a great step in reinforcing our collaboration with both national and regional partnerships. Before I look into the details, I wish to introduce the National Cohesion and Integration Commission, in which I am the Chairperson. Before I delve into this, I wish to acknowledge the Commissioners, the Commission Secretary and the senior staff that joined me on this purposeful engagement.

The Commission was established after the chaos of 2007/2008 general elections with the key mandate to facilitate and promote equality of opportunity, good relations, harmony and peaceful co-existence among persons of different religious, ethnic and affiliations. In order to achieve this mandate, the Commission has adopted four main strategies including research, public education and advocacy, peace building, investigations and enforcement. Although the Commission has recorded substantive progress, a lot still needs to be done to cultivate a more cohesive society.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen**

In order to succeed in the field of peace building, the Commission cannot work by itself. We require partnerships. A saying goes that if you want to go faster, walk alone but if you want to go far, walk with others. At the Commission, we prefer to go far. So, we are willing to join efforts with like-minded stakeholders to ensure that Kenya is a peaceful country. In doing so, we harness both state and non-state partnerships with the aim of sharing experiences and techniques, design frameworks of conflict analysis and undertake joint interventions. Indeed, broad-based collaborations with like-minded national, regional, continental and even global partners work very well in strengthening the national peace building infrastructure. It is therefore, not a coincident that the Commission participated in the training offered by COMESA in 2019 in Machakos, Kenya. We were privileged to meet the African Union at the same training. This was the first step to a series of correspondence that has brought us here today.

### **Honorable members**

In my thinking, I realized that there is one strand that ties all the institutions represented in this training. We all want Kenya to be a peaceful country. Of course, the mandate of some of the institutions goes well beyond Kenya to cover other countries. This only strengthens the convergence of our goals because, although the Commission's mandate is only national, we acknowledge that peace

in our neighboring countries translates to peace at home and vice versa. And indeed, peace in the world also means peace at home. So, as much as we do not work beyond our country, we fully complement partners who work towards achieving peace across our borders.

I also realized that we need each other because of the different strengths we bring to the table. While some will moot and implement programs, others will advocate for change in the policy environment, and yet others will actualize these policy and legislative changes. This is the full cycle of change that is sustainable because it does not only address the apparent issues but also targets structural challenges.

In so many words, am saying that the Commission is ready to complement the efforts of the African Union and COMESA in exploring avenues to deliver sustainable peace to Kenya, the COMESA region and the continent at large. This is partly why we agreed to participate in this training to understand the work that both the AU and COMESA are doing in addressing underlying causes of conflict. At home, we are already working closely with the National Assembly Committee on National Cohesion and Equal Opportunity to promote social cohesion among Kenyans.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The key strategic direction of the Commission for the next one and a half years is to deliver a peaceful election in the country. As you know, Kenya's elections have been accompanied by intermittent violence since the early 90's. Today, violence has become a common means of expressing opposition and dissent on most issues. It is therefore a momentous task for us to address all potential sources of violence as we head to these general elections. One of the identified roadblocks to a violence-free election in Kenya is inadequate or total lack of immediate interventions to curb escalation of violence. This has propagated more instability around elections. In our election's roadmap, we want to strategically disrupt violence by establishing a robust election early warning and rapid

response system that will tap into the existing sub-systems across the country. In this regard, the Commission also wishes to learn from the continental and regional early warning systems established by both the AU and COMESA.

### **Distinguished delegates**

Another major source of electoral conflicts in Kenya is the prevailing structural inequalities in the distribution of both economic and political resources. The resulting violence is only a symptom of broader failures to address grievances within a society. Many may agree that the monitoring of the progress of peace is obviously important in any post-conflict society like Kenya. But how does one measure peace or cohesion, a fluid, highly subjective phenomenon? Adding to the difficulty is the changing content of norms such as peace and cohesion across both time and space. In fact, Johan Galtung's definition of peace that differentiates negative and positive peace demonstrates just how complex it is. So, the very notion of a peace index or social cohesion barometer seems to embody an impossible quest.

Nevertheless, the Commission embarked on this quest in 2014 by developing a set of quantitative indicators to measure social cohesion and then applied them across the country. The results showed highlighted the critical components that needed a lot of attention in the Kenyan context including the issues of equity and trust. The Commission is undertaking a similar social cohesion index this year. The Commission is ready to learn about more innovative approaches to achieve this.

### **Honorable members,**

The challenge of elections and instability around elections is not unique to Kenya. It is a common challenge experienced in most countries in the world. The fact that we almost reached the brink of a civil war in 2007 woke us to the realization of the effects of such violence to the social fabric and the economy. That is why we would like to learn from other countries like Zambia on how we

can conduct our elections in a way to ensure that violence is only a part of the past and not the present or future of Kenya.

Although at first COVID-19 was perceived to mainly impact the health and economic sectors, there is increasing consensus that the pandemic has imposed severe ramifications on the social sector, especially on peace building. This meeting is taking place because we have attempted to rise above the challenge that the pandemic presents us so that we can participate in these discussions, strengthen partnerships and learn new ways of improving our interventions.

So, this is, to me a remarkable opportunity for the stakeholders like ourselves to reflect upon the past and current approaches to peace and identify viable options to address the emerging challenges in our societies.

I therefore thank COMESA for inviting us, receiving us at the airport and supporting this engagement. Our gratitude also goes to the African Union for being willing to share with us, the Kenyan High Commission for making our stay pleasant, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the National Assembly committee on National Cohesion for always supporting the Commission in our work.

**Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,**

In conclusion, I believe we are ready to engage the very interesting topics lined up ahead of us as is evidenced in the Program. But as we discuss and interrogate a variety of presentations, I urge us to confront the challenges in order to provide the solid solutions for peace in Kenya and in the continent at large.

Thank you and May God bless you.

**REV. DR. SAMUEL KOBIA**  
**CHAIRPERSON, NATIONAL COHESION AND INTEGRATION COMMISSION**  
**(NCIC)**