



**STATEMENT BY HER EXCELLENCY CHILESHE MPUNDU
KAPWEPWE SECRETARY GENERAL – COMESA**

**DURING THE OPENING OF THE 42nd MEETING OF THE
INTERGOVERNMENTAL COMMITTEE**

**VIA VIDEO CONFERENCING
2-4 NOVEMBER 2021**

Chairperson of the Intergovernmental Committee;

Permanent and Principal Secretaries;

Assistant Secretaries General in charge of Programmes and Administration and Finance;

Your Excellencies Ambassadors and High Commissioners accredited to the Republic of Zambia and Permanent Representatives to COMESA;

Representatives of International and Regional Organisations;

Our Co-operating Partners here present;

Heads of COMESA Institutions;

Members of Staff of the Secretariat;

Distinguished Delegates;

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my pleasure and privilege to address the 42nd Meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee. Allow me at the very onset to express my profound gratitude for your enduring support and commitment to COMESA's integration agenda and especially during this challenging period of Covid-19 pandemic.

The Covid-19 pandemic continues to impact on people's health and livelihoods, causing global economies to stall, changing the way we work and interact. The economic disruptions brought about by Covid-19 are global and unprecedented with consequences on the achievements we have made as a region.

Excellencies; Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Trade facilitation is a key focus of COMESA's integration agenda. Under market integration, we have made significant progress in implementing trade facilitation instruments, especially those focusing on automation of customs operations, upgrading of border posts, digitalization of processes and procedures, monitoring and resolution of non-tariff barriers to trade. To increase formal small-scale cross border trade and ensure increased income for small scale traders, most of whom are women, we have implemented various policies and instruments for small-scale traders including the Simplified Trade Regime, trade facilitation and human mobility border specific action plans and the Migration Informational and Data Analysis System.

Globalization of services provides the opportunity for developing countries and the COMESA region in particular, to find new niches where they can specialize, scale up and achieve rapid growth. I note that the path to full integration of the region is still marked by obstacles in the movement of people and services. In this regard, the Secretariat continues to build capacity of Member States in services negotiations and trade in services statistics.

The Covid-19 pandemic threatens to reverse the gains we have made in trade liberalization. The Guidelines for the Movement of Goods and Services across the COMESA Region were adopted in May 2021, to minimize disruption to cross-border trade in goods and services during the COVID-19

period. We also developed an online portal for exchange of information on production and availability of essential products within the region. I appeal to Member States to continue the implementation of the guidelines and make use of the online platform to ensure availability and seamless flow of goods and services during the Covid-19 period.

In ensuring that our region has a critical mass of trained people to support regional integration agenda, COMESA has developed a virtual master's degree programme in regional integration. The programme is hosted by Kenyatta University of Kenya in collaboration with 21 universities in the region. I am pleased to report that eight universities have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with COMESA to offer the programme. The programme is currently running at Kenyatta University and University of Mauritius.

COMESA continues to provide leadership and support in negotiations for the African Continental Free Trade Area and Tripartite Free Trade Area. The ratification of the TFTA Agreement has been rather slow with 11 ratifications to date against a requirement of 14 for operationalization. The Secretariat and the other Tripartite RECs are undertaking national sensitization in member/partner countries to fast track the ratification process. I urge Member States who have not signed and those who have signed and not ratified the Agreement to do so.

Excellencies; Ladies and Gentlemen,

Industrial development is at the heart of COMESA's integration agenda. You will agree with me that inclusive and sustainable industrialization, as well as investment in infrastructure and innovation are key drivers of economic growth and development. COMESA is committed to implementation of the Industrialization Strategy 2017-2026 which focuses on nine priority sectors.

In recognition of the need to increase our production capacities in critical goods and services, we have developed guidelines on increasing sustainable and inclusive industrial production during and after the Covid-19 pandemic, and implementation strategy of the COMESA local content policy framework. These will increase availability of locally produced goods and services thereby increasing intra-COMESA trade.

The Secretariat is supporting Member States in developing and implementing national agriculture policy frameworks, strategies, programmes, and tools that promote and support investments in agriculture for increased production, improved regional food security and access to competitive regional and global markets.

Availability of infrastructure facilities and services as well as efficiency of such services help to increase returns on investment by reducing production costs and improving transition efficiency. COMESA's transport infrastructure programmes are based on a holistic corridor-based approach to infrastructure development and anchored on three key pillars namely

development of priority regional physical infrastructure, policy and regulatory harmonization and facilitation.

In the energy sector, most Member States have developed policies and regulations that are compliant with COMESA model energy framework. We will be reviewing the model energy policy to make it responsive to new developments such as increased focus on climate change and new technological developments such as renewable energy, among others.

The Covid-19 pandemic has led to increased use of Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) services in adhering to lockdowns, physical distancing and lowering transmission of the virus. However, affordability remains a challenge.

COMESA continues to implement ICT programmes. Most Member States have domesticated the model ICT policy guidelines and regulations which has led to opening of the ICT sector to competition. Independent regulators have also been established to foster regional cooperation and ICT development. Implementation of cybersecurity institutions and policies is ongoing albeit at a slow pace mainly due to lack of local expertise in the field of cyber security, policies and legislation and cyber security infrastructure.

Excellencies; Ladies and Gentlemen,

COMESA recognizes the need for participation of men, women, and youth in its regional integration agenda. I am pleased to report that we held the first meeting of the COMESA Ministers of Youth Affairs in June 2021 to discuss

issues pertaining to youth participation in the integration agenda. To monitor the implementation of commitments and priorities of the COMESA Youth Empowerment programme and other continental and international frameworks for the youth, we have developed COMESA reporting guidelines on the youth which will assist Member States in reporting on implementation of the youth empowerment strategy as well as sharing good practices on youth empowerment and integration in development.

COMESA has put concerted efforts to ensure access of information and networking for women through the 50 Million African Women Speak Digital Platform. I am pleased to report that virtual launches of the platform have been held in 17 Member States. I appeal to Member States who have not launched the platform to work with the Secretariat to ensure the platform is launched in their respective countries.

Excellencies; Ladies and Gentlemen,

COMESA continues to support Member States in Governance, Peace and Security issues. This is meant to address the economic and structural dimensions of conflict, which enables us to work to exploit the nexus between peace, security, and development. We continue to disseminate structural vulnerability assessment reports to Member States as a conflict prevention measure thus ultimately enhancing peace and security in the region.

Under the umbrella of the Regional Maritime Security Programme, we have made efforts to strengthen the Anti-Money Laundering regimes of Member States by working with stakeholders such as financial intelligence units and

law enforcement agencies. We have also supported Member States on greater collaboration as well as support to adhere to international standards as set by the Financial Action Task Force.

Excellencies; Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Secretariat has finalized the 2021-2025 Medium Term Strategic Plan which will be presented to you for adoption. The MTSP has been aligned with continental and global development goals. It is based on 4 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 of sustainable economic and social progress in Member States through increased co-operation and integration in all fields of development.

The 2021-2025 Medium Term Strategic Plan recognizes the need for effective stakeholder participation in regional integration agenda. In this regard, the implementation of the MTSP will be based on the principle of subsidiarity by key stakeholders including the COMESA Secretariat, COMESA Institutions, Member States, Cooperating Partners, Regional Economic Communities and the African Union Commission.

Excellencies; Ladies and Gentlemen,

Your meeting will receive various Ministerial reports for noting. It is our collective responsibility to ensure that regionally agreed programmes are effectively implemented at the national level. You will also receive, for your

consideration, reports of technical committees; the COMESA Medium Term Strategic Plan for the period 2021-2025; progress reports on various COMESA programmes; and reports of COMESA institutions.

Allow me to thank our co-operating partners who continue to support us and provide resources to finance COMESA's programmes.

With these remarks, I look forward to fruitful deliberations and recommendations that aim to uphold COMESA's aims and objectives.

Thank you for your kind attention.