



STATEMENT BY

**HER EXCELLENCY CHILESHE MPUNDU KAPWEPWE
COMESA SECRETARY GENERAL**

**DURING THE OPENING OF THE 44TH MEETING OF THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL
COMMITTEE**

21 NOVEMBER 2023

**The Chair of Council and our Guest of Honour, Honourable Chipoka Mulenga, MP,
Minister of Commerce Trade and Industry, Zambia**

**Your Excellencies Permanent Secretaries, Ambassadors and High Commissioners,
Heads of COMESA Institutions,**

**Representatives of Development Partners, Continental and International
Organizations,**

Members of the Press

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have the pleasure and honour to welcome you all to this 44th Meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee being held here, in the beautiful City of Lusaka, Zambia. I would also like to take this opportunity to express my utmost gratitude for your continued commitment and support to COMESA's integration agenda.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our meeting is taking place at a time when our economies continue to be negatively impacted by various global and regional economic challenges. Supply chains for essential commodities continue to be strained by adverse supply shocks initially induced by the COVID-19 pandemic, followed by the negative impacts of geo-political conflicts around the world. The need for strengthening regional trade and economic integration becomes more imperative than ever under such circumstances.

As you are aware, COMESA draws its mandate from the COMESA Treaty. As such, the basis of the COMESA Medium-Term Strategic Plan 2021-2025, which is currently under implementation, is the Treaty itself, whose provisions reflect the aspirations of the COMESA region. Yet, the implementation of the Medium-Term Strategic Plan with its 5 pillars of Market Integration, Physical Connectivity/Infrastructure, Productive Integration, Gender and Social Integration and Effective Secretariat and indeed the implementation of the different COMESA programmes is dependent on effective stakeholder participation and Member States support.

**Guest of Honour,
Distinguished Delegates,**

Pursuant to the above, allow me to present some brief updates on our programmes, highlighting some key achievements and challenges.

In pursuit of market integration, we have continued to implement our Trade Facilitation Programme with notable achievements to date, including in terms of automated customs systems; national single window systems, the Simplified Trade Regime and NTB reporting, monitoring and eliminating mechanism. With the support of the European Union, we are finalizing preparations to roll out some of our digital free trade instruments, including the Electronic Certificate of Origin, Customs Automation Regional Support Centre and the Regional Trade Information Portal.

In addition, the Yellow Card Scheme and the Regional Customs Transit Guarantee (RCTG) Scheme continue to contribute to the smooth movement of vehicles, cargo and persons within the COMESA region and beyond. In this regard, it is very encouraging to note that Djibouti, DR Congo and Ethiopia are finalizing preparations to commence implementing the RCTG.

Another significant step is the development of an Online Platform for COMESA Negotiations of Trade in Services, with the support of the African Export-Import Bank (AFREXIMBANK). We hope this platform can expedite the liberalization of services in our region.

Leveraging on our size as the biggest, functional regional economic community in the continent, COMESA continues to play a leading role in supporting continental integration efforts through its broad institutional network which encompasses the COMESA Competition Commission, Trade and Development Bank, African Trade Insurance Agency, ZEP-RE re-insurance, COMESA Business Council and the African Leather and

Leather Products Institute. These institutions are playing important roles within the COMESA region as well as at the continental level.

With regard to the Tripartite FTA, this agreement remains a strategic tool to enhance continental integration, with its three pillars, namely Market Integration, Infrastructure Development and Industrial Development. I am pleased to indicate that under the leadership of COMESA, the 5th meeting of the Tripartite Council of Ministers was convened in March 2023 and adopted several tripartite road transport instruments. In addition, the Kingdom of Lesotho recently signed the Tripartite Agreement raising the number of signatory Member States to 23, while the number of ratifications remains at 11, with 3 more ratifications needed for the agreement to enter into force.

Excellencies,

With regard to the infrastructure pillar, it is universally accepted as a key enabler for both production and distribution. It is thus a major determinant of economic growth and development. However, there is a deficiency of infrastructure in the region which calls for resource mobilization, including through Public Private Partnership (PPP) as we are all aware, that public funding alone, is not adequate to bridge the infrastructure gap.

COMESA transport sub-sector programmes seek to promote all modes of transport by undertaking activities that promote efficiency and regional connectivity. In this regard, the road sub-sector focus has been on facilitating corridor efficiency. COMESA also continues to support projects that promote railway, maritime and inland water transport.

In collaboration with the regional economic communities of EAC, IGAD, IOC and SADC, COMESA is leading the implementation of the Support to Air Transport Sector Development (SATSD) programme, whose activities are furthering air transport market integration within the framework of the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM), which is one of the AU Agenda 2063 flagship projects.

Activities under the energy sub-sector continue to focus on the development of new power generation sources and promoting regional power trading among Member States in the COMESA region. The \$10million World Bank funded Regional Infrastructure Finance Facility (RIFF) supported the review of the COMESA Model Energy Policy Framework developed in 2007 and developing COMESA Model Solar Standards and COMESA Model Common Customs Tariffs Framework (MCCTF) for Solar Products.

In the ICT sub-sector, COMESA is leading the implementation of a robust ICT programme that seeks to promote market competition, public-private partnerships, effective regulation of internet and mobile operators to promote security, affordability and universal access of services in the Eastern Africa, Southern Africa and Indian Ocean region.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Under the Productive Integration pillar, significant efforts are being made, including the development and implementation of the digital Regional Food Balance Sheet (RFBS) initiative, development of Guidelines on Strategic Food Reserves, formulation of a Regional Irrigation Development and Agricultural Water Management Strategy and supporting Member States in the implementation and reporting on the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP).

In addition, the COMESA Secretariat is facilitating the implementation of a common agro-processing park between Zambia and Zimbabwe and the African Development Bank is providing financial assistance to develop the pharmaceutical sector.

Distinguished Delegates,

Our activities on gender, women empowerment and social development are based on the mandate enshrined in the COMESA Treaty. On this basis, our Member States have made commitments at regional, continental and global levels to not only ensure equality for all, but to specifically work towards uplifting our women and engaging our youth.

In the same vein, the Secretariat continues to strive to ensure that gender equality is the norm and development is inclusive and sustainable to ensure inclusive and shared prosperity for all.

Excellencies, Distinguished delegates,

Various reports will be submitted to your meeting, including the reports from Ministerial Committee meetings and various COMESA institutions that continue to actively advance COMESA's regional integration agenda. Going forward, the effective implementation of the decisions of Council at the national level remains a collective responsibility in order to accelerate regional integration.

At this juncture, allow me to take this opportunity to express our profound gratitude to all our co-operating and development partners for providing resources to support our work through programmes. Indeed, their collaboration, is critical in enhancing and facilitating the advancement of our regional integration agenda. On that note Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, let me conclude by wishing you fruitful deliberations, as we look forward to your recommendations and guidance to pursue and accelerate the implementation of COMESA's regional integration agenda.

Thank you for your kind attention, God bless you all!