



STATEMENT BY

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

**DURING THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE 44TH MEETING OF THE
COUNCIL OF MINISTERS**

LUSAKA, ZAMBIA

23 NOVEMBER 2023

Your Honour the Vice President, Madam Mutale W.K Nalumango, Our Guest of Honour,

Honourable Charles Milupi, MP Minister of Infrastructure, Housing and Urban Development and Acting Minister of Commerce, Trade and Industry, and Chairperson of the COMESA Council of Ministers;

Honourable Ministers here Present;

Senior Government Officials;

Excellencies Permanent Representatives to COMESA;

Excellencies Ambassadors and High Commissioners;

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

Our Cooperating Partners;

Representatives of International and Regional Organizations;

Distinguished Delegates;

Staff of the Secretariat;

Heads and Staff of COMESA Institutions;

Members of the Press;

Ladies and Gentlemen.

A warm welcome to you all to this Forty Fourth Meeting of the COMESA Council of Ministers. Let me also take this opportunity to express my profound gratitude for your enduring commitment and support to the advancement of COMESA's integration agenda.

Guest of Honour, Honourable Ministers,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are meeting at a time when our economies are still in the process of recovering from the negative effects of the COVID19 Pandemic and amid geo-political conflicts around the world, natural disasters and effects of climate change. All these constrain supply chains for essential commodities, including agricultural inputs, food and fuel, among others. This situation calls for even more collaboration in strengthening regional trade and economic integration.

Guest of Honour, Honourable Ministers,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our cooperating partners including the European Union, World Bank, African Development Bank and other stakeholders, provide financial resources to support our regional programmes. Without the assistance of these partners, work under our programmes would be greatly impaired. Allow me, therefore, to take this opportunity to extend our profound gratitude for this support.

In that vein, I am glad to inform this Meeting that on Monday 20th November 2023, COMESA and the European Union signed **two Financing Agreements** which will provide new grants to COMESA with total value of EUR 48.2 million. The two programmes will focus on improving the overall trade competitiveness of COMESA member states, while seeking opportunities that come along with global challenges, such as climate change, and making trade more sustainable and will further contribute to enhancing the overall competitiveness of enterprises, which provide services, including through digital platforms.

Guest of Honour, Honourable Ministers,

Distinguished invited Guests,

The COMESA Medium-Term Strategic Plan 2021-2025, formulated under your guidance clearly aligns to the key dictates of the COMESA Treaty. To this end, the COMESA programmes are clustered into five pillars namely; Market Integration, Physical Connectivity/Infrastructure, Productive Integration, Gender and Social Integration and an Effective Secretariat. These pillars are not only a testament to the diversity of economic and social challenges confronting our region but also provide a framework for mainstreaming programmes and activities and a scope for specialization at the same time.

Guest of Honour, Honourable Ministers,

Distinguished invited guests,

With respect to the market performance and key achievements in the implementation of our programmes; In 2022, COMESA's exports to the world increased by 15% while the value of intra-COMESA exports increased by 10%. Imports sourced from the COMESA market were ranked in fourth position and increased by 27% in 2022.

Under the market integration pillar, we have continued to implement our Trade Facilitation Programmes with notable success in terms of automated and digitalized customs systems, the Simplified Trade Regime and the Tripartite online Non-Tariff Barriers reporting, monitoring and eliminating mechanism.

COMESA continues to facilitate the smooth movement of vehicles, goods and persons within COMESA and between COMESA and other regions through the implementation of the Yellow Card and the Regional Customs Transit Guarantee (RCTG) Scheme.

With regards to facilitation of trade in services, we will during this meeting witness the launch of an Online Platform for COMESA Negotiations of Trade in Services which aims to expedite the negotiations, provide tools to improve the technical quality of offers and increase the transparency, while at the same time safeguarding the confidentiality of information exchanged between the parties. May I take this opportunity to express my profound gratitude to the African Export-Import Bank (AFREXIMBANK) for supporting the development of this platform.

**Guest of Honour, Honourable Ministers,
Distinguished Delegates,**

During the year under review, COMESA continued to play an active role in the implementation of the Tripartite Free Trade Area Work Programme. So far, 23 Member States have signed the Tripartite Agreement while 11 have ratified it, thus only 3 are remaining for the Agreement to come into force, I call upon remaining Member States to expedite ratification.

Guest of Honour, Honourable Ministers
Distinguished Participants

Inadequate infrastructure in the region remains one of the major constraints to economic growth and development. Inadequacy of infrastructure has resulted in inefficiency of ports, railways, costly road transport, limited access to electricity and water. There is therefore a need to mobilize resources including through Public Private Partnership (PPP) as public funding is not adequate to bridge the infrastructure gap.

I am pleased to report that as a result of implementation of a EU funded Programme in the Eastern Africa, Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean Region, many activities furthering air transport market integration within the framework of the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM) have been undertaken.

Significant strides have also been made in the energy sector to develop new power generation sources, optimize usage of regional energy resources and promote regional power trading through promoting power interconnection 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, and development of the COMESA Model Solar Standards and COMESA Model Common Customs Tariffs Framework for Solar Products which were adopted by the Ministers of Infrastructure at the meeting of 14th September 2023. Based on the success of the RIFF project, the World Bank is considering provision of an additional \$50million.

Guest of Honour, Honourable Ministers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Industrial development remains at the core of COMESA's integration agenda. The COMESA Secretariat is facilitating the implementation of a common agro-processing park

between Zambia and Zimbabwe. In this regard, a pre-feasibility study as well as a study on policy, legal, regulatory and institutional frameworks have been commissioned.

In addition, COMESA received financial assistance from the African Development Bank to develop the regional pharmaceuticals sector. The principal objective of this project is to provide institutional support for the development of the pharmaceutical industry.

COMESA continues to promote the agriculture sector. As part of its effort to strengthen regional agri-food data and information systems, the Secretariat continues to implement the digital Regional Food Balance Sheet initiative in six pilot countries. The platform aims to inform data-driven policy, trade and investment decisions on agricultural development and food security in the region.

**Guest of Honour, Honourable Ministers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

COMESA recognizes the need for effective participation of men, women and youth in its regional integration agenda to ensure that socio-economic development is inclusive and sustainable and benefits all - without leaving anyone behind.

On this basis, the COMESA Secretariat continued to support gender mainstreaming across sectors, women economic empowerment, women market access and incomes. In the same vein, the Secretariat also continued its efforts to enhance youth engagement, capacity building and cultural and creative arts initiatives.

Honourable Ministers,

Our governance, peace and security programmes have continued to support continental efforts that are aimed at the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts.

During the year, the remit of our Early Warning System expanded to eight Member States. We also supported several countries to strengthen their Anti-Money Laundering regimes through a range of capacity building programmes.

I am pleased to report that COMESA and the African Union launched a joint and fully integrated observer mission to Zimbabwe in July 2023. We also had a similar mission to Madagascar earlier this November and we are planning for similar missions to Egypt and DRC in December this year. In this framework, we usually reach out to the African Union to launch joint observer missions, which allows us to cover more ground with minimal resources.

**Guest of Honour, Honourable Ministers,
Distinguished Invited Guests,**

We have made significant strides in a number of priority areas, which can serve as a springboard to propel us to greater heights. We remain focused on our mandate and resolute on the achievement of our objectives. On that note, let me conclude by wishing you fruitful deliberations, as we look forward to your guidance on how to advance our regional integration agenda.

I thank you for your attention, God bless you all!