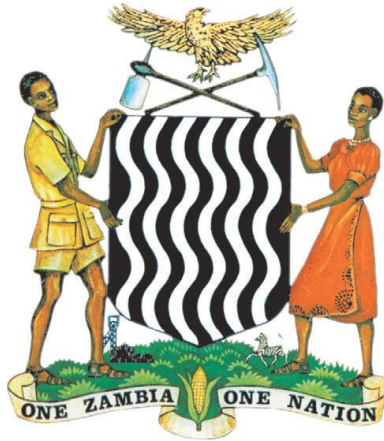


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**MINISTRY OF COMMERCE, TRADE AND INDUSTRY**

**STATEMENT FOR POSSIBLE USE BY HON. CHIPOKA MULENGA,  
MP, MINISTER OF  
COMMERCE, TRADE AND INDUSTRY**

**DURING THE OPENING OF THE 44<sup>TH</sup> COMESA INTER-  
GOVERNMENTAL COMMITTEE MEETING  
HELD IN LUSAKA ON**

**21<sup>ST</sup> NOVEMBER 2023**

- **Your Excellency, Ms. Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe the Secretary General of COMESA,**
- **Honourable Lady Justice Lombe P. Chibesakunda, Judge President of the COMESA Court of Justice,**
- **Distinguished Members of the Inter-Governmental Committee,**
- **Honourable Heads of COMESA Institutions,**
- **Assistant Secretaries General,**
- **Excellencies High Commissioners and Ambassadors, Permanent Representatives to COMESA,**
- **Representatives of International and Regional Organizations,**
- **Cooperating Partners Present,**
- **Distinguished Delegates,**
- **Members of the Press;**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I take this opportunity to welcome you all to Lusaka, Zambia and a virtual welcome to those attending online. It is my privilege to officiate at the 44<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) Intergovernmental Committee as Guest of Honour.

Allow me at the outset to express my profound appreciation to Her Excellency Ms. Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe, the Secretary General of COMESA, for her stewardship and the entire COMESA Secretariat team for organizing this important meeting.

**Chairperson, Distinguished Delegates,**

The Intergovernmental Committee is an important platform that brings together representatives of Member States to deliberate on the COMESA

regional integration agenda and make recommendations to the Council of Ministers on the way forward.

COMESA continues to play an important role in advancing the development of our economies through championing a wide set of regional economic and social integration initiatives, in line with its treaty and vision, to improve the living standards of all our people.

The agenda before us is rich and enables us to take stock of the progress we are making in the implementation of various programmes through the network of COMESA institutions as well as COMESA's Medium-Term Strategic Plan 2021 - 2025. It is particularly rewarding to note that many of our institutions have come of age and have been playing significant roles in supporting the integration agenda. Indeed, some of our institutions are already operating beyond COMESA's within the context of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA).

**Chairperson, Distinguished Delegates,**

COMESA has continued to support regional integration through the implementation of various trade facilitation instruments, including simplification of customs procedures and processes, automation of customs operations, establishment of national single window systems and resolution of non-tariff barriers to trade. The main objectives of these instruments are to improve efficiency, reduce the costs and time of cross-border trade transactions and increase the competitiveness of our goods and services.

**Chairperson, Distinguished Delegates,**

Despite our abundant natural resources and joint strenuous efforts, our region remains prone to chronic hunger, poverty and inequality. This is why there is an urgent need for a change of mindsets to trade more with each other, invest more in value addition and strengthen national and

regional value chains. I am happy to note that COMESA has continued to implement various programmes to support agriculture and food security such as the Regional Food Balance Sheet Initiative, being piloted in six Member States, namely Zambia, Malawi, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda and Tanzania, and the Regional Enterprise Competitiveness and Access to Markets Programme (RECAMP) which seeks to enhance competitiveness and market access in horticulture, agro-processing and leather products.

**Chairperson, Distinguished Delegates,**

Our region is vastly endowed with minerals such as gold, copper, diamond, lithium, magnesium and cobalt. Yet, these minerals continue to be siphoned out of our countries as primary products and re-imported into the region as manufactured products. It is time to identify the right incentives for industrialization diversification for the benefit of the region and the continent as a whole. It is also important to encourage green investments and enhance our joint efforts to confront the risks of climate change. Tapping into available opportunities however requires investing more in skills development and innovation. This is why the COMESA Annual Research forum and other capacity building platforms should be enhanced.

**Chairperson, Distinguished Delegates,**

Infrastructure development and connectivity are fundamental ingredients for sustainable economic growth and development. Our region suffers from critical infrastructure gaps in road, rail, maritime and air transport, energy and ICT. Lack of appropriate infrastructure aggravates the problems of poverty and inequality and increases the costs of production and doing business both domestically and regionally. Therefore, we need to enhance our joint efforts and tap onto more resources to bridge the infrastructure gap, thereby making cross-border trade, value addition and industrial development more profitable.

**Chairperson, Distinguished Delegates,**

In addition, sustainable economic development cannot take place if vulnerable segments of the population are left behind. Thus, women, youth and the differently abled should be supported. I am happy to note that COMESA is actively promoting inclusive economic development across its programmes. Specific programmes such as the Simplified Trade Regime (STR) support small-scale cross-border traders, majority of whom are women and youth. Meanwhile, domestication of the COMESA Gender Policy and Youth engagement programmes, capacity building and sensitization ensure all stakeholders are effectively involved in the integration activities.

**Chairperson, Distinguished Delegates,**

Let me also underscore the importance of maintaining peace and security as a cardinal foundation for sustainable socio-economic integration in the region. On this front, COMESA has continued to support continental efforts that are aimed at the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts. Yet, poverty and inequality further exacerbate the challenges of peace and security. We should therefore, use the opportunities provided by regional trade and investment to produce more wealth and reduce the levels of poverty and inequality in our countries.

As I conclude, I wish to underscore the necessity of continuing to support the COMESA Secretariat to enable it to discharge its duties and responsibilities.

I also wish you a fruitful meeting and pleasant stay in Lusaka. It is now my singular honour and privilege to declare this meeting of the 44<sup>th</sup> Intergovernmental Committee of COMESA officially open.

**Thank you for your attention!**

**--END--**