

## COMESA Mourns Zambia's Sixth President Dr. Edgar Chagwa Lungu

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COMESA has joined the region in mourning the passing of H.E. Dr Edgar Chagwa Lungu, Zambia's sixth president. In a message of condolences to H.E. Excellency President Hakainde Hichilema, Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe expressed profound sadness at the news of the demise of President Lungu on 5 June 2025.

"On behalf of the entire Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa and indeed on my own behalf, I would like to convey our most sincere and heartfelt condolences to his family, the people and Government of Zambia for this loss," the Secretary General said.

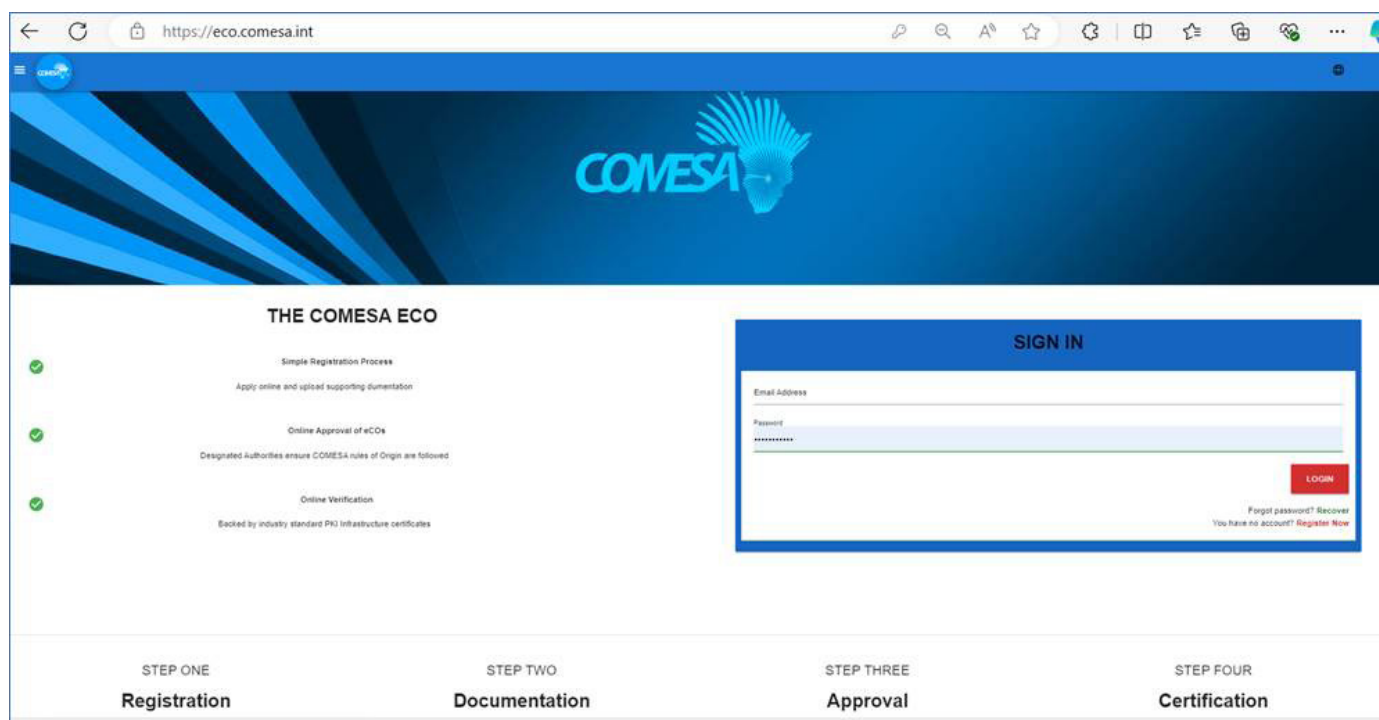
She added that President Lungu played a central role in promoting regional integration and development efforts not only for COMESA but the entire African continent. In particular, he led efforts in ensuring that Zambia hosted a successful 20th Summit of the COMESA Heads of State and Government in Lusaka in July 2018.

He was also a dedicated champion for other regional economic integration efforts including the African Continental Free Trade Area. His commitment to regional peace, democracy and stability ensured a peaceful transition of leadership in August 2021 after the country's general elections that year.

During this period of national grief and mourning, COMESA stands in solidarity with the Lungu family, the people and the Government of Zambia.



COMESA Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe with H.E. Dr Edgar Chagwa Lungu at the Inauguration of Ze-Pre Business Park in Lusaka



## AfCFTA Delegation Undertakes Benchmarking Mission on COMESA e-Certificate of Origin

On Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> June 2025, the COMESA headquarters in Lusaka hosted a high-level delegation from the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Secretariat on a benchmarking mission to learn from COMESA's implementation of the electronic Certificate of Origin (e-CO) system.

Speaking during the meeting, Dr Christopher Onyango, Director of Trade and Customs at COMESA described the interaction as timely and a positive move towards having a truly integrated continental market.

He explained that the benchmarking mission aimed at gaining insights into the design, implementation, and operationalisation of the COMESA e-Certificate of Origin, a digital innovation that supports efficient trade within the region. The visit underscored the alignment of regional and continental efforts to modernise trade processes and enhance intra-African trade.

"We are honoured to host this important

benchmarking mission. Your presence reflects our shared commitment to advancing trade facilitation through digital transformation, and we deeply value our ongoing cooperation, particularly in the area of Rules of Origin," said Dr Onyango to the visiting delegation led by Ms. Demitta Gyang, Director of Customs at the AfCFTA Secretariat.

The electronic Certificate of Origin system was launched by COMESA on the 27 November 2024 to replace the traditional manual system. The e-CO system streamlines the issuance and verification of certificates of origin, which are essential for traders to access preferential tariffs under the COMESA Free Trade Area. The system has been successfully piloted in Eswatini, Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, with other Member States currently in various stages of onboarding.

The e-CO system ensures interoperability between national and regional platforms and enhances trust and transparency, increases accuracy, and supports environmental sustainability by reducing

paper-based processes.

Ms Gyang said experiences from regional economic communities like COMESA offer valuable practical inputs into shaping a robust and functional continental trade framework which the AfCFTA could benefit from.

Both parties agreed that the benchmarking mission reflected the broader collaborative efforts between COMESA and the AfCFTA Secretariat toward achieving the vision of the Abuja Treaty on the African Economic Community. The mission also served as a platform for exploring further areas of cooperation in customs and trade facilitation.





# Strengthening the Regional Pharmaceutical Sector

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Delegates at the pharmaceutical meeting in Kenya

COMESA is making significant strides in transforming the region's pharmaceutical landscape through a strategic initiative that promises to reshape healthcare access across the 21-member bloc.

From 3 to 4 June 2025, COMESA convened a two-day Competence Building and Consultative Meeting in Nairobi, Kenya, for creating a sustainable institutional framework for pharmaceutical sector development. This was within the framework of the regional pharmaceutical project that the COMESA Secretariat is implementing with support from the African Development Bank through the African Development Fund.

This initiative goes beyond traditional trade cooperation, recognising that robust healthcare systems and pharmaceutical self-sufficiency are fundamental pillars of regional integration and sustainable development.

Director of Industry and Agriculture at COMESA Secretariat Mrs Providence Mavubi said the challenges faced in the pharmaceutical sector are both urgent and complex as such the region needed a coordinated, strategic approach that leverages the collective strengths while addressing the shared challenges.

She described the pharmaceutical project as necessary to strengthen regulatory frameworks and ensure compliance with international standards, support implementation of robust quality control measures to guarantee the safety and efficacy of the products.

"Your expertise, insights and commitment will be instrumental in shaping a framework that is both practical and transformative," Mrs Mavubi said to the delegates drawn from health ministries and institutions.

In close collaboration with AUDA NEPAD and with participation of key stakeholders

including World Health Organisation Africa Regional Office for Africa, United States Pharmacopeia, Vizuri and the Ecumenical Pharmaceutical Network, this initiative aligns with continental frameworks like Agenda 2063, the Pharmaceutical Manufacturing Plan for Africa and the African Medicines Regulatory Harmonization programme.

COMESA is positioning itself as a catalyst for pharmaceutical transformation that will ultimately benefit millions of citizens across Member States.

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**Mrs Providence Mavubi**

# Reinforcing Aviation Safety in South Sudan



Experts at the sensitization workshop in Juba, South Sudan

COMESA and the East African Community (EAC) recently conducted a four-day sensitization workshop in Juba, South Sudan, on aviation safety focusing on enhancing compliance with the Abuja Safety Targets (ASTs), adopted in 2012.

The Abuja Declaration on Aviation Safety in Africa addresses key areas like establishing autonomous civil aviation authorities and implementing international safety protocols. It also aims to reduce high accident rates in African airspace and promote safe, efficient, and seamless aviation operations.

The workshop held 19-22 May 2025 was supported under the Support to Air Transport Sector Development (SATSD) in the Eastern Africa, Southern Africa, and Indian Ocean (EA-SA-IO) Region.

South Sudan's Civil Aviation Authority (SSCAA) faces challenges, such as inadequate trained and certified personnel due to high training, licensing, and funding costs.

The baseline study showed that most Member States have implemented State

Safety Programs and Safety Management Systems programs, and Windhoek Aviation Security and Facilitation Targets. However, challenges persist in achieving Abuja safety targets and SMS implementation due to resource constraints and limited awareness and technical capacity.

Dr. Zacharia Kingori, COMESA Senior Transport Economist, noted that only one of the five surveyed Member States had achieved 60% Effective Implementation of the Abuja Safety Targets.

Mr. Paul Rwegasha, EAC Principal Civil Aviation Officer, emphasized the workshop's importance as South Sudan intensifies efforts to align its aviation sector with regional and international safety standards. The country is implementing a three-phase project to establish a comprehensive State Safety Oversight System, guided by the EAC Secretariat and supported by AFCAC and the European Union's Aviation Safety in Africa initiative.

The first phase of the project, developing primary civil aviation legislation, regulations, and technical guidance materials, was successfully completed. South Sudan is

now implementing its newly promulgated Civil Aviation Act and Regulations, investing in aviation infrastructure and services, and meeting global standards.

Mr. Johnson Marun Telar, Director for State Safety Programs at SSCAA, emphasized the importance of training in ensuring safety and building staff capacity, noting that the workshop was crucial for South Sudan to learn about the Abuja Declaration on Aviation Safety in Africa.

"Our recent aviation legislation, signed last year by President Salva Kiir, is now fully implemented. We've also developed the first phase of the regulation with EAC Partner States, and finished phase two with support from other African countries. We're now on the Abuja safety targets, based on these documents."





Participants of the workshop in Lusaka

## A Stronger Yellow Card for a More Connected COMESA

COMESA has embarked on a new phase of strategic development for its flagship Yellow Card Scheme, with the launch of a regional consultative process aimed at shaping the 2026-2030 Strategic Plan. This initiative marks a key milestone in the continued evolution of the Scheme, which plays a central role in facilitating cross-border vehicle movement and regional trade integration.

Council of Bureaux Secretariat Chief Executive Officer Mr Calven Mutyavaviri said the Yellow Card Scheme continues to evolve through ongoing policy refinement, stakeholder engagement and regional cooperation.

He was speaking during a three-day

consultative forum held from 3-5 June 2025 in Lusaka to engage stakeholders from across the region in defining the Scheme's strategic vision, priorities and performance goals for the next five years.

The upcoming plan builds on the foundations laid by the 2018-2022 and 2020-2024 strategic plans, both of which are the result of broad-based consultations across COMESA Member States.

In a major step toward institutional strengthening, the COMESA Council of Ministers in 2022 approved the transformation of the Yellow Card's Council of Bureaux into an autonomous institution, supported by a fully dedicated secretariat.

## COMESA Retreats to Finalise New Medium Term Strategic Plan

Management and selected staff from COMESA Secretariat held a two-day retreat to finalise the 2026-2030 Medium Term Strategic Plan to replace the current one which has ran its course.

Assistant Secretary General for Administration and Finance Dr Dev Haman addressed the team and encouraged all to actively participate and match interventions to needs of Member States, while ensuring all inputs into the MTSP are feasible and contribute to COMESA's core mandate.

"We need to make sure that our inputs are contributing to our main mandate of market integration," Dr. Haman urged staff, and challenged them to ensure the MTSP is focused.

"It is good to dream, but let's limit those dreams into those that are actionable," he said. "Let's not be overambitious, let's not keep carrying things we cannot do," Dr. Haman said. He further noted the importance of collaboration with partners.

## Impact of Priority Non-Tariff Trade Barriers and Restrictions to Trade in Rwanda



Ms. Alice Twizeye, Senior Trade Officer.

COMESA, in collaboration with Rwanda's Ministry of Trade and Industry (MINICOM), held a Validation and Sensitization Workshop on 27-28 May 2025 focused on reviewing the draft report of a study assessing the impact of priority non-tariff barriers (NTBs) and trade restrictions in Rwanda, particularly their impact on Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs).

Speaking during the opening of the workshop, Ms. Doreen Ntawebasa, Director General at the Ministry of Trade and Industry, commended COMESA for its support in conducting the study and emphasized the importance of identifying NTBs and other trade-related challenges. She welcomed the study's recommendations for addressing them.

Ms. Alice Twizeye, Senior Trade Officer, on behalf of COMESA Secretariat, said the study was the timely and importance, noting its relevance in advancing the COMESA Free Trade Area (FTA) for seamless trade.

She thanked the Government of Rwanda for its initiative and efforts to facilitate trade across the COMESA Region while undertaking such a study to assess and identify NTBs affecting trade and SMEs in particular with an objective to reducing them if not eliminating them.

Based on the findings of the study, clear recommendations and policy brief for possible reforms will be shared with Rwanda regulatory agencies and other stakeholders for possible policy and regulatory reforms for further implementation. She underscored the need for renewed efforts by Member States to eliminate non-tariff barriers to increase intra-COMESA trade.

The workshop brought together key stakeholders, including members of the National Trade Facilitation Committee, senior government officials, representatives from micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and industry regulators.



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