**COMMON MARKET FOR EASTERN AND**

**SOUTHERN AFRICA**



**OPENING REMARKS by**

**COMESA Secretary General**

**H.E. Chileshe MPUNDU Kapwepwe**

**at**

**The 9th Joint Ministerial Meeting ON Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment**

**HELD IN**

**LUSAKA, ZAMBIA**

**8TH AUGUST 2025**

**Honourable Ministers,**

**Excellencies Ambassadors and High Commissioners,**

**Distinguished Representatives of our Development and Technical Partners,**

**Distinguished Representative of the African Union Commission,**

**Distinguished Representative of the Food and Agriculture Organization,**

**Distinguished Representative of the World Organization for Animal Health,**

**Representatives of the Private Sector,**

**Representatives of the Media,**

**Colleagues from the COMESA Secretariat and other COMESA Institutions,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Good morning!

I am greatly honoured to address you today at this 9th Joint Ministerial Meeting on Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment, where we have come together to deliberate on issues of great importance to our people and our continent. Let me begin by extending a warm welcome to you all to Lusaka, Zambia, and expressing my gratitude to the Government of Zambia for hosting these important meetings. I also welcome those who could not make it to Lusaka and who are joining us virtually.

**Honorable Ministers,**

This meeting provides a platform to collectively review the progress made in implementing your Decisions made during the 8th Joint Ministerial Meeting held in November 2022. It also provides an opportunity to deliberate on recent developments related to agriculture, natural resources and the environment and needed collective efforts to develop and transform these critical sectors into drivers of socio-economic development and regional integration.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

COMESA’s main objective is to enhance economic growth and improve the livelihoods of its citizens. To achieve this, we adopt a developmental approach to regional integration, centered on key pillars: Trade and Investment, Agriculture, Industrialization, and Infrastructure Development. Special attention is paid to forging inclusive and sustainable socio-economic transformation and creating an enabling environment in terms of governance, peace, and security.

Agriculture, in particular, remains a critical economic sector in our region, significantly contributing to GDP, while sustaining livelihoods of our smallholder farmers, and a wide range of value chain actors. From crops and horticulture to livestock and fisheries, this sector drives regional food security, wealth creation and broader economic resilience and growth. This is why we spare no effort to strengthen agricultural productivity and trade, with focus on advancing regional self-sufficiency, enhancing competitiveness, and increasing access to markets. This is in alignment with the African Union’s Agenda 2063 and the global Sustainable Development Goals. COMESA also remains steadfast in its drive to support Member States to enhance investment and attract more foreign investment in this vital sector.

To cultivate a vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable agricultural sector, we will continue to prioritize attracting targeted responsible investments in rural infrastructure, farming systems, agro-processing, and value chains transformation, with due consideration to the importance of sound management of natural resources and the environment.

**Honorable Ministers,**

The COMESA Secretariat has played a critical role in facilitating and coordinating the implementation of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program (CAADP) in the region. The Secretariat is also supporting the development of the Zimbabwe-Zambia common agro-industrial park CAIP.

We continue to provide support to our Member States under several related programs. To name but a few, we have recently concluded the implementation of the Regional Enterprise Competitiveness and Access to Markets Programme, which was funded by the European Union. In addition, we are implementing a Regional Food Balance Sheet initiative that aims to enhance timely access to near-real time data for decision making on food security early warning as well as increased evidence-based economic and trade policies. We also continue to collaborate with other organisations such as AU-IBAR, FAO and the World Organization for Animal Health (WOAH) to improve the production and productivity of animal resources and eradicate Transboundary Animal Diseases (TADs).

Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Measures and Technical Barriers to Trade remain persistent challenges to expanding regional trade in agricultural and food commodities. To address these challenges, COMESA has actively supported several Member States to conclude Mutual Recognition Agreements, with focus on facilitating smoother cross-border trade in key staple commodities.

Recognizing the evolving nature of SPS risks and the need to align with continental and international standards, we have undertaken a comprehensive revision of our 2009 SPS Regulations, updating outdated provisions. The revised COMESA SPS Regulations and a framework for the COMESA Reference Laboratories System, both essential tools for strengthening regional agricultural trade and safety standards, will be presented for your consideration during this Meeting.

**Distinguished Participants,**

Access to quality seeds and fertilizers is at the heart of our agriculture transformation agenda. Through our specialized agency, the Alliance for Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa (ACTESA), we have been advancing the COMESA Seed Harmonization Implementation plan (COMSHIP) to facilitate movement and access to quality seeds across the region. This initiative has helped trigger COMESA regional seed trade, which is currently at about 500,000 MT/year and is projected to increase to 2 million MT by 2031.

In addition, ACTESA is implementing the COMESA EAC Horticulture Accelerator (CEHA) programme, aiming at transforming the horticultural industry in the COMESA region currently at USD 4 billion to be tripled in the next 10 years.

**Honorable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Our region continues to face unprecedented challenges, including climate change shocks and conflicts that disrupt food supply chains and threaten basic livelihoods. In addition, while we have seen notable strides in agricultural development, as reflected in the improved performance of many COMESA Member States under CAADP, the region remains **OFF TRACK** to meet the Malabo commitments by 2025. These findings underscore the urgent need for bold, innovative solutions to accelerate our agricultural transformation efforts.

**Honorable Ministers,**

We appreciate the efforts being made by our Member States to ensure food and nutrition security by undertaking critical emergency mitigation measures, including drought and flood management, support to vulnerable groups and adapting to climate change.

However, I would like to emphasize that climate-change related stresses, including floods, droughts and plant and animal disease outbreaks demand a re-think towards re-engineering the agriculture sector for greater functionality and efficiency, and re-positioning to harness opportunities. Comprehensive harmonized approaches to disaster response and resilience building are imperative for preparedness to address future threats confidently.

 **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Let me take this opportunity to sincerely thank Member States, our team at the COMESA Secretariat and our partner organizations for all the efforts made to transform agriculture, enhance resilience, and protect the environment in our region.

I wish you fruitful deliberation!

**GOD BLESS YOU** and Thank you very much for your attention.