

**SPEECH BY THE HONOURABLE VICE PRESIDENT CDE J.T.R MUJURU AT THE OPENING OF THE MEETING OF COMESA MINISTERS OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS: ELEPHANT HILLS HOTEL, VICTORIA FALLS, 5 JUNE 2009**

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The Chairperson of the Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs – Hon. Moses Wetangula

Honourable Ministers and heads of Delegation

The Secretary General of COMESA, Mr. Sindiso Ngwenya

Distinguished Delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the Government and people of Zimbabwe, I would like to welcome you to this scenic resort town of Victoria Falls. I trust that the hosting of COMESA Policy Organs Meetings at this natural wonder and world heritage site will provide a congenial atmosphere for your very important deliberations on the peace and security situation in the COMESA region.

May I take this opportunity to thank COMESA Member States for their support and solidarity during the period when our country was facing unwarranted hostility for having dared to assert our right to control our destiny and natural resources. We are gratified that through the facilitation of our regional institutions and the African Union we are hosting the COMESA summit and Policy Organs Meetings as an Inclusive Government unified in our efforts to address the economic challenges facing our country. We applaud this shining example of an African solution to an African problem.

Honourable Ministers, I wish to congratulate you for the progress you have made since the launch of the COMESA Summit on Peace and Security Programme in 1999. Peace, security and stability are indeed essential pre-requisites for sustainable development and deepening our regional integration. Conflicts not only result in destruction of lives, property and infrastructure but also divert resources and energies from the pursuit of productive activities to improve the

standard and quality of lives of our people. It is therefore imperative that our first priority should be to prevent differences from degenerating into conflicts.

In this regard, I welcome the initiative by the region to put into place structures to undertake preventative diplomacy missions on behalf of the region. I note that your meeting will consider the Rules of Procedure for the Committee of Elders and hope that this will expedite the election of the Elders who will be important role players in our conflict prevention initiatives. It is also gratifying to note that the peace and security programme is premised on broad-based participation by stakeholders.

I also note that significant progress has been made to establish and launch the Inter-Parliamentary Forum for COMESA, which will, among other things, promote understanding of the systems in our various countries, promote public awareness and contribute to entrenching democratic and representative structures in our region.

Honourable Ministers, for these structures to be effective, they need to be supported by an equally effective early warning system. It is therefore important as a region to enhance capacity to detect brewing conflicts so that timely interventions can be triggered before problems escalate into fully blown violent conflicts.

In the event that conflicts breakout in the region, we need to pay an active mediation role. Indeed, within our region, there are a number of inter and intra-State disputes which present a challenge to our collective diplomatic skills. I am confident that the wide pool of diplomatic experience assembled here will enable us to make meaningful recommendations to our Heads of State and Government to advance out mediation efforts in collaboration with the Africa Union and the United Nations for the speedy resolution of these conflicts which not only divide us, but also detract our regional integration efforts.

A number of countries in the COMESA region are emerging or have recently emerged from situations of conflict. They face the challenge of resettling internally displaced persons and refugees and assisting them to rebuild their lives. It is critical for us to offer them support to ensure that they do not slide back into conflict. It is therefore commendable that our peace and security programme includes components on post-conflict reconstruction, rehabilitation and development such as the Trade for Peace Project which objective is to stimulate productive economic activities in areas emerging from conflict.

Honourable Ministers, peace is not just the absence of war, but also requires us to address conditions that fuel war. As long as the conditions remain, they constitute a threat to peace. It is therefore critical to put in place sustainable measures to tackle the underlying causes of conflict. In this regard, poverty, food insecurity, unemployment, homelessness, deprivation, HIV/AIDS and other socio-economic ills pose serious threats to peace and stability. Clashes which often manifest themselves as political, territorial and ethnic differences often mask undercurrents of a scramble for limited resources.

While we have made far reaching progress in our market integration programmes, we still face the challenge of ensuring that our programmes have a discernible impact on the day to day lives of our people. We have been in a Free Trade Area since the year 2000 and will in the next two days be launching a Customs Union.

We need to ensure that the benefits from exponential growth in trade filters through broadly to all sections of our population, particularly the most vulnerable groups. Women and children, who often bear the brunt of conflict, are unfortunately the most marginalized in the region's economic programmes. It is therefore important as we formulate our peace and security strategies to bear in mind the linkage between peace and security and adverse socio-economic

conditions in our communities. Hence, our conflict prevention strategies have to take into consideration equitable access to resources, gender balance and basic human needs as well as inclusiveness in economically empowering our citizens.

Honourable Ministers, It is now my honour to declare the Ninth Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs officially open.

I wish you productive and successful deliberations.

I thank you