

**Address by the Prime Minister of Zimbabwe, The Right Honourable Morgan  
Tsvangirai, to the 26<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the COMESA Council of Ministers,  
Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2009**

Mr. Chairman,  
Honourable Ministers,  
The Secretary General of COMESA, Mr Sindiso Ngwenya  
Your Excellencies, High Commissioners and Ambassadors  
Representatives of International and Regional Organisations  
Distinguished Delegates and Guests  
Members of the Print and Electronic Media;  
Ladies and Gentlemen;

On behalf of the Government and people of the Republic of Zimbabwe, I am pleased to welcome you to the Twenty-sixth Meeting of the COMESA Council of Ministers.

Zimbabwe appreciates the role that COMESA is playing in spearheading the integration of the economies of Eastern and Southern Africa, and is proud to host the Policy Organ Meetings and Summit.

Your presence at these meetings, clearly demonstrates the support that your countries have for COMESA programs and the determination we all have in ensuring that through COMESA, we collectively achieve the noble objective we have set for ourselves within the agreed time-frames.

In addition, we in Zimbabwe look forward to playing our part within COMESA and within the region. The formation of our inclusive Government provides the foundation to rebuild our economy and COMESA provides a firm framework within which such rebuilding can take place.

Zimbabwe is currently utilising less than 20% of its installed national capacity in all sectors and, as we seek to engineer a recovery in our economy and to restore the utilization of our productive capacity, we will be looking for opportunities. The top priority for Zimbabwe will be the opportunities presented to us in the COMESA region because of the favourable trading terms and conditions developed by the organisation over the past decade.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Guests;

Your meeting today is taking place just a few days from the official launch of the COMESA Customs Union. As you are aware, in October 2000, we launched Africa's first Free Trade Area on schedule. You may also be aware that when the FTA was launched on 31 October 2000, only nine member states joined. I am pleased to announce that since then, membership of the FTA has expanded and to date, fourteen member states are participating in the FTA.

I am further gratified to note that Non Tariff Barriers to trade, which have the capacity to threaten the smooth flow of goods across our borders, are being reported and negotiated, through an NTB Monitoring and Reporting System that also covers SADC and EAC. This makes movement of goods smoother and our business communities stand to benefit from these measures.

Our Secretary General has informed me that Member States have undertaken analytical work on how best to effect the necessary adjustments in national tariffs and revenue structures and have also consulted extensively with all stakeholders in readiness for the Customs Union.

I am further informed that most of the preparatory work at the technical level has been undertaken and the region can go ahead and launch the Customs Union.

I am quite confident that in spite of the various challenges that we continue to face, the launch of the Customs Union on the 7<sup>th</sup> of June, signals another achievement for COMESA as this important milestone in the integration agenda is launched. COMESA should then begin to find ways and means to quicken integration towards free movement of persons which is another milestone in the integration program that must be reached soon.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates;

As we seek to attain full integration in our region, we need to be aware that many other regions have already agreed to free trade. These include the Pacific Region where the Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) is being consolidated, the Americas under the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA) and the MERCOSUR group, Europe under the European Union, which has expanded to 27 members and is likely to receive new members in the near future, and the free trade area between Europe and the Mediterranean region.

If large economies in America and Europe are seeking bigger markets by fostering regional integration, the smaller economies of Africa have an even greater need to come together in a regional, and subsequently, continental common market.

The world that we live in today affects, and is affected, by global events and programs. There is a great deal of market integration as a way of reducing dependence on small, individualized national markets. COMESA Member States must ensure that we engage these issues. Our countries need deeper levels of integration particularly at this time when global recession is on the rampage and affecting different countries in different ways. The need for market integration as a way of creating and maintaining bigger markets therefore cannot be over emphasized.

We have agreed on a timetable for the implementation of various integration measures, and it is essential that we complete this process on time if our people are going to enjoy genuine and sustainable development in the foreseeable future. In today's highly competitive global economy, the full and the faithful implementation of our decisions is a matter of fundamental interest to all of us.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates;

COMESA institutions play a significant role as our regional integration deepens.

Allow me to single out the Regional Investment Agency for embarking on programs aimed at attracting investors to the COMESA region. It is gratifying to note that the Agency's programs are targeted at both traditional and non-traditional sources of investment. I am grateful to our brothers and sisters in Egypt who are hosting the Regional Investment Agency and providing facilities for its smooth integration.

It is indisputable that foreign investment improves and enhances economies. However, COMESA countries must undertake policy reforms and institute measures necessary to encourage greater investment in Eastern and Southern Africa. The need to design national level policies that emanate from, and compliment, regional policies is essential.

Similarly, I am grateful to our brothers and sisters in Malawi, who have offered to host the COMESA Competition Commission which is an important institution for the equitable, harmonious and fair integration of our national economies. As we all know, competition policy is a necessary economic tool for sustainable development and a just economic order at the national, regional and global levels. We are therefore eager to see the COMESA Competition Commission begin to enforce competition law in the region and regulate the conduct of enterprises, especially multinational corporations.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates;

Our region suffers from a high level of unemployment and a large number of our people live in conditions of severe poverty.

In our endeavor to eradicate poverty and eliminate unemployment, the assistance of international co-operation we receive must complement our social and economic reforms and it must be based on the realities of our situation. Our acceptance of support from our international partners must compliment our development goals and be based on mutual respect and development.

I see no other way to address these challenges except through the development of the productive sectors of agriculture and industry. Your decision, a few years ago, that industry and agriculture be given appropriate emphasis in the new structure of COMESA is a necessity for accelerated development in our region.

Unfolding events at the multilateral level affect us all. Negotiations at the WTO for a development round have stalled while negotiations with the European Union for Economic Partnership Agreement have reached a critical stage.

These are challenges that we must confront and address to our mutual benefit. Solidarity and unity of purpose will help us realize meaningful benefits from these arrangements that have so far eluded our people.

I therefore call on you to take firm decisions regarding the stalled WTO negotiations and provide leadership and direction for the remainder of the EPA negotiations. As we all know, trade preferences alone are inadequate to address the development challenges that our region faces. EPA's must, therefore, offer more than just trade preferences and quotas.

They must induce increased economic activity and sustainable development for the region. We cannot continue to be sources of raw materials and commodities for industrial development in the north. We cannot continue to produce what we do not consume and consume what we do not produce.

This is of particular relevance within our continent, as intra-African trade represents less than 5% of our total trade and the COMESA arrangements lay the foundation for rapid growth in this area.

Therefore, we must ensure that the Customs Union and other integration programs that we have agreed to must be faithfully and religiously implemented.

Our Treaty provides adequate safeguards for any transitional and short-term limitations that any sector of our regional economy may encounter. We must, therefore, resort to these safeguards rather than slowing down the wheels of integration.

Mr. Chairman, I wish to emphasise that we have come a long way and that we have reached the point of no return. The COMESA Court of Justice is now in place and so we are able to develop a common understanding of our commitments under the Treaty.

I am confident that given your experience and knowledge, you will be able to recommend concrete measures to ensure that we all comply with the decisions that we have jointly undertaken to launch the Customs Union and begin its implementation immediately.

Your meeting will contribute greatly to the region's vision of becoming fully integrated and internationally competitive with free movement of goods and services for the prosperity of all the people of COMESA.

I wish to thank you all for your commitment to developing our region through cooperation and integration, and on behalf of the Government of Zimbabwe, I wish you fruitful deliberations.

I THANK YOU.