

8th June 2009

COMESA Launches its Customs Union



The 13th Summit of the COMESA Heads of State and Government which kicked off today (Sunday 7th June) Launched with pomp the COMESA Customs Union in Victoria Falls - Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwean President Robert G Mugabe who assumed the Chairmanship of the COMESA Authority for the next one year presided over the launch Ceremony. In his Launch remarks Mr. Mugabe asked the region to celebrate this mile stone " We have come to the moment that celebrates our existence as- The launching of the COMESA Customs union. This past year, everything in COMESA focused on the Customs Union- we have thought and talked Customs Union, we have slept the Customs union, we have dreamt the Customs union; This then is the hour we have been waiting for"

The launch was attended by the 19 COMESA States

Among the heads of state and government that attended include the outgoing Chairman of COMESA Kenyan President Mwai Kibaki, King Mswati the III of Swaziland, who is scheduled to host the 2010 Summit, Ugandan President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, Djibouti President Ismail Omar Guelleh , Sudanese President Omar Hassan al Bashir, Zambian President Rupiah Banda, and Seychelles President James Michel.

Also launched at the Summit is the COMESA Regional payment and Settlement System (RPSS)

Speaking ahead of the launch the COMESA Secretary General Mr Sindiso Ngwenya, pointed out that with the launch of the Customs Union, business will find it easier to establish and operate in the COMESA region, and that companies will easily list to establish on multiple stock exchanges, goods and services will also be traded with ease and with more confidence.

Kibaki hands over COMESA chairmanship to Mugabe

President Mwai Kibaki has asked the COMESA secretariat to come up with interventions to cushion COMESA member states against the global economic crisis.

Noting that the economic crisis was having a negative effect on many countries, President Kibaki said the secretariat be on the lookout and advise on strategies to be taken to address the projected slowdown in economic growth.

“I wish to appeal to the COMESA secretariat to closely monitor the unfolding scenario and advise on what interventions we will need to make in order to cushion our members,” President Kibaki said.

The President was speaking today (Sunday 13th June 2009) at the official opening of the 13th COMESA Summit of Heads of State and Government at Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe.

During the occasion, President Kibaki handed over the chairmanship of COMESA Authority to Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe after heading the regional economic bloc for two years.

President Kibaki emphasized that the level of preparedness of COMESA member states will determine how they will take advantage of the opportunities that will arise once the economic crisis is over.

In this regard, the President urged COMESA member states to remain focused on the broader agenda of the integration of the continent by simultaneously strengthening their relations with other regional blocs in Africa.

“It is for this purpose that we have in the past emphasized the need for harmonization of programmes especially the Free Trade Areas and Customs Unions between the regional economic communities in the Eastern and Southern African region,” he said.

President Kibaki appealed to COMESA member states to remain committed to the regional organization, saying the unique and critical attributes have seen the regional economic bloc through its advancement from a Preferential Trade Area (PTA) to the Free Trade Area (FTA) leading to the launch of the COMESA Customs Union.

“Kenya is proud of these developments and will continue to make its contribution to the success of COMESA,” President Kibaki said.

During President Kibaki’s tenure as Chairman of COMESA, he facilitated the holding of a successful tripartite summit of COMESA, SADC and EAC in



Fund thus bringing the full membership of the Fund to ten.

As a result, the President said the COMESA Fund has been made operational and provides time-bound budgetary support to those countries that may face temporary structural challenges during the transition period towards the Customs Union.

“The Second window of the COMESA Fund also seeks to address the region’s infrastructural needs and arrangements are underway to make it operational,” the President said.

President Kibaki expressed optimism that the COMESA Infrastructure Fund will be used as a platform for mobilizing both private and public sector resources for accelerating infrastructure development in the region. At the same time, the President said, the Aid for Trade Unit in COMESA has fully been established and the North-South Corridor was launched as a priority Aid for Trade project in April this year.

Expressing hope that this effort will be replicated to cover other corridors in COMESA, President Kibaki said there should be simultaneous implementation of the Northern Corridor, from Mombasa to Goma in DRC and Bujumbura in Burundi via Kampala Uganda, Kigali Rwanda, the Lamu- Southern Sudan-Ethiopia Corridor as well as the Djibouti -Addis Ababa Corridor.

Similarly, the Head of State said progress has been made in the programme for the promotion of trade in services which have potential for enhancing growth of the economies of all member states as it now contributes about 45 per cent of the COMESA G.D.P. “I am encouraged to note that intra-COMESA trade reached the 15 billion dollar mark in 2008, from 3.2

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Photo President Kibaki and Mugabe exchanging the instruments of power

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During President Kibaki's tenure as Chairman of COMESA, he facilitated the holding of a successful tripartite summit of COMESA, SADC and EAC in Kampala in October last year which resolved to harmonize programmes and move towards a merger of the three regional organizations into one single bloc.

The President pointed out that the process of merging COMESA, SADC and EAC will begin with the establishment of a free trade area arrangement covering all three regional economic communities.

It was also during Kibaki's tenure that several member states ratified the protocol establishing the COMESA Fund

thus bringing the full membership of the Fund to ten. As a result, the President said the COMESA Fund has been made operational and provides time-bound budgetary support to those countries that may face temporary structural challenges during the transition period towards the Customs Union.

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"I am encouraged to note that intra-COMESA trade reached the 15 billion dollar mark in 2008, from 3.2 billion in 2001 when the COMESA Free Trade area was included. There is greater potential for promotion of intra-COMESA trade if we maintain peace and security in the region," he said.

To consolidate the regional market, President Kibaki said the COMESA Common Investment Area which has been designed to improve the business climate in the region, harmonize COMESA investment policies and increase investment flows in the region has been adopted by member states.

Speaking during the occasion, President Mugabe thanked President Kibaki for ably steering the regional economic bloc for the last two years, noting that during that period COMESA made several significant achievements. The Zimbabwean President stressed the need for the integration of Africa continent, saying economic integration will accelerate development in the continent.

He called upon the COMESA member States to put money into the group's COMESA Fund to help cut dependence on foreign assistance.

"Let us contribute our own resources to the fund which can enable us to finance infrastructural development without any strings attached," he said.

The two-day summit, being held in the resort town of Victoria Falls, w launched the COMESA Customs Union for its 19 member states stretching from Swaziland in the south to Egypt in the north, Madagascar in the Indian ocean to DR Congo on the Atlantic ocean. Mr Mugabe urged business leaders to explore investment opportunities in the region.

"There is need for our organisation to work to speed up the implementation of our programme towards greater development and integration," he said.

COMESA ELECTS A COMMITTEE OF ELDERS FOR PREVENTIVE DIPLOMACY

Following a Decision by the Seventh Summit of the COMESA Authority that was held in Djibouti in November 2006 for COMESA to put in place a Committee of Elders, the Ninth Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs conducted an election for the first set of five Elders for COMESA. Five distinguished citizens of COMESA, Madam Immaculee Nahayo of Burundi, Ambassador Mrs. Soad Shalaby of the Arab Republic of Egypt, Ambassador Bethuel Kiplagat of the Republic of Kenya, Ambassador Anund Priyay Neewoor of the Republic of Mauritius and Mr. Atem Garang Deng Deduek of the Sudan were elected. If endorsed by the COMESA Authority, these Elders will serve for a term of four years.

The total number of Elders to be elected for COMESA is nine, but a Decision was made to spread out the elections within two years. The second set of four elders will be elected during the 10th Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs. That will ensure that there will be a one year overlap between the new and the old Elders in 2014 after the term of the first set of these five Elders expires.

The election of the elders is seen as a great milestone for COMESA and it responds directly to the COMESA Mandate of conflict prevention.

Complementing the election of the Elders is the establishment of a conflict early warning system for COMESA, which is expected to monitor structural conditions to conflicts and ensure that these are addressed before the escalation of conflict situations to violence.

It is expected that the COMESA Committee of Elders will complement the AU Panel of the Wise and thus effectively contribute towards building the African Peace and Security Architecture. These Elders, whose primary function will be preventive diplomacy are expected to be a huge boost to the office of the Secretary General of COMESA in responding to the Decisions of the Authority.

COMESA Honours Mwencha



COMESA has honoured its former Secretary General Mr Erastus Mwencha, for his contribution to COMESA and regional integration in Africa.

Mr Erastus Mwencha who is now the Deputy Chair person of the Africa union Commission served COMESA for over 25years the last ten as Secretary General.

The honour was bestowed on him at the historical COMESA Summit that launched the Customs Union , at Victoria Falls Zimbabwe on the 7th June 2009.

Ngwenya Presents the plaque of honour
Accepting the honour Mr. Mwencha said he receives the honour not only for himself but for COMESA he thanked the Authority for this honour adding that his feels proud that he was replaced by His former Assistant Secretary General Mr Sindiso Ngwenya, and that both Mr Ngwenya and Mr. Karangizi(the new assistant Secretary General programme) had worked with him for 10 years as Assistant Secretary General(programmes)and director of Legal and Institutional Affairs respectively.

JAPAN PLEDGES TO ENHANCE SUPPORT FOR COMESA and Africa in general

JAPAN has pledged to assist COMESA and Africa at large with concessional loans, grants and technical assistance.

In his remarks after presenting his letter of credentials as Special representative of Japan to COMESA to the COMESA Secretary General Mr Sindiso Ngwenya yesterday (Saturday 6th June) , Japans ambassador to the Republic of Zambia Mr Hideto Mitamura said COMESA member states and Japan enjoyed a cordial relationship based on mutual respect, open dialogue and close cooperation for the common good.

“Japan will double its ODA for Africa by 2012. Japan is determined to carry out its commitments made at TICAD IV without fail. In this regard, Japan will actively mobilize 4billion US dollars in concessional loans to Africa over a five year period,” he said.

Mr Mitamura said his country will also expedite the implementation of a 2billion US dollar grant and technical assistance in order to help African countries tackle the current financial and economic crises.

“In the field of infrastructure development, with particular focus on regional transport and power infrastructure, Japan has already made commitment for projects amounting to 140 million US dollars which is approximately 386percent of the total amount of assistance of 370 million US dollars” announced in the Yokohama Action Plan,” he said.

After receiving the credentials, Mr Ngwenya said the relationship between the two had been cemented. “I wish to recognize the special interest that Japan has in supporting development of the one stop border posts,” he said

COMESA Media Awards



Following the decision of the COMESA Authority in Djibouti in November 2006, to carry out a competition for the COMESA Media Award with the view to interest the media in the region on regional integration and economic reporting, the 1st winners were awarded at the historical COMESA

the print category

Below Secretary general of COMESA Mr Sindiso Ngwenya, poses with the winners after warding them. The call for submission for entries to the 2010 awards shall be made in the last quarter of 2009

Summit that launched the Customs Union on the 7th June 2009.

The adjudication was carried out by University media academicians from Rhodes University South Africa.

The 2009 winner were Evelyn Wanjiru Njoroge of capital FM Nairobi who scooped the Radio category, Patrick Kamara, NTV Uganda who took the television category and Julius Barigaba of the East African , who won

THE African Development Bank continues to support COMESA

THE African Development Bank has broken its loaning facility scheme by approving a whopping US\$1.5 billion quick disbursing budget loan to one of the COMESA member states.

This was revealed by the bank's president Dr Donald Kaberuka in a statement at the 13th COMESA Heads of State Summit.

Although he did not name the country, he said that country's economy had been severely hit by the fall in the demand for its main commodity.

"We have front loaded budget support to several members of COMESA and are prepared to do more. We are in discussion with shareholders of the bank to provide us with additional fire power to be more responsive," he said.

Mr Kaberuka said the region should resist temptation to reverse policies that have worked so well in the past.

"We must persist in improving investor climate and business confidence everyday. It takes months and years to put up a building, yet it takes minutes to demolish- so is business confidences," he said.

Dr Kaberuka added that it is important for COMESA to accelerate its framework of climate proofing agriculture and overall adaptation strategies.

He said the bank's support to regional integration programmes across the five African regions had tripled over the last 2 years.

"We now commit just under \$1 billion per annum to this domain. In supporting corridors, electricity power pools, regional centers of excellence and other regional public goods and as research and disease control centers as well as management of common waterways," he said.

Dr Kaburuka was at the 13th Summit at the invitation of COMESA as head of the African continental bank that is a major partner to COMESA and its member States

I HAD A WONDERFUL DREAM

I had a wonderful dream

A dream so wonderful and beautiful

So real as the rising sun was the dream

Surely the dream was sweet and beautiful

As an African Eagle I flew

Flying so high up in the blue skies

Below was a glamorous spectacular view

So stunning and captivating from the skies

The Might Victoria falls pictured from above

Like the bride adorned for the ceremony

Her white raiment forming a splendid view

She is a symbol of perfection and harmony

The Zambezi River complimenting the attraction

Pouring volumes of water into steep gorges below

Causing the Falls to explode into natural radiance

Undoubtedly the World's largest waterfall

All life moved in tempo and pace with the Falls

Wildlife and humans shared this gift of Nature

Pictured from above the Might Victoria Falls

Harmony charity unity are free gifts of Nature

The seed of Unity today has been sown

Freely given to life by creation

When the silent voice of Nature spoke

Unity Harmony Love and Prosperity prevailed

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