



**STATEMENT BY**

**THE COMESA SECRETARY GENERAL  
CHILESHE MPUNDU KAPWEPWE**

**DURING THE OPENING OF THE FIFTH TRIPARTITE COUNCIL OF  
MINISTERS MEETING**

**VIRTUAL**

**29<sup>th</sup> MARCH 2023**

**Chairperson of the Council of Ministers**

**Honourable Ministers,**

**Distinguished Delegates from Tripartite Member States,**

**Your Excellencies Ambassadors and High Commissioners,**

**My Colleagues Executive Secretary of SADC and Secretary General of EAC,**

**Distinguished members of the Tripartite Sectoral Ministerial Committee on Trade, Finance, Customs and Economic Matters and Home/Internal Affairs; Infrastructure and Industrial Development**

**Representatives of International Organisations,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**All Protocols Observed**

Let me start by warmly welcoming you all, Honourable Ministers and all delegations to this fifth meeting of the Tripartite Council of Ministers which is our first Virtual Council meeting since the last physical meeting which was held in October 2016 in Nairobi, Kenya. Let me take this opportunity to also warmly welcome several dignitaries and partners who have graced this meeting.

I take this as a great honour and privilege to address this official opening of the 5<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Tripartite Council of Ministers. Our meeting today after a long period signifies the importance that you Honourable Ministers and distinguished delegates still attach to furthering the commitments under the Tripartite initiative. I would, therefore, like to thank you all profoundly for

participating in this meeting amidst your competing endeavors. Whilst I would have hoped that we were convening this meeting face-to-face, I do recognize that we should not allow our current circumstances to stop us from progressing our priorities.

The COVID-19 pandemic is still posing secondary unprecedented economic and enormous human health impairment across the world and our economies have not been spared. The pandemic disrupted the national, regional and global industrial production of goods and services including supply chains for the goods and services, leading to their scarcity and increased prices and ultimately affecting the welfare of the citizens in the region. This has been exacerbated by geo-political developments, including ongoing conflicts in eastern Europe. These incidences provide an opportunity to engage in a frank discussions about our collective efforts to trade and development and “build back better” through resilient and sustainable economies.

**Honourable Ministers; Excellencies; Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Your meeting today will build on a very robust 9<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Tripartite Sectoral Ministerial Committee on Trade, Finance, Customs and Economic Matters and Home/Internal Affairs which concluded yesterday.

Despite the challenges posed by the COVID 19 and slowed impetus in negotiations of the Tripartite, tremendous progress has nevertheless been realized. Under the Market Integration Pillar, several programmes have been developed to build capacity, facilitate trade, and prepare readiness for the Tripartite Free Trade Area Agreement (TFTA) implementation as well as in

the exchange of tariff offers. Under Phase II negotiations, the draft Protocol on Competition Policy has been finalized and work has already begun in developing the draft implementation modalities for the Protocol. On trade in services negotiations, a study is being undertaken to bring clarity on the interfaces between the TFTA and AfCFTA negotiation processes and, specifically, to inform on how to position the Tripartite Member/Partner States to ensure effective complementarity and synergy.

**Honourable Ministers; Excellencies; Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The recent recognition of the Tripartite initiative as a success story during the African Union's 4th Mid-Year Coordination Meeting held in Lusaka, Zambia from 14th to 17th July is testimony to its relevance and integral to fostering continental integration. We should therefore renew our efforts to take advantage of political goodwill to operationalize the TFTA as a building block to the AfCFTA

Indeed, ratification of the TFTA is one of the items on the agenda of the meeting today. Since the launch of the TFTA, in June, 2015 in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt, to date out of 22 member/partner states have signed the agreement, only 11 Member/partners states have ratified. The agreement will enter into force upon ratification by 14 member/partner states and we are only 3 member/partner states short to reach our goal.

In that regard, I would like to congratulate the championing role being played by the new government of the Republic of Kenya. It is notable that the President of Kenya recently sent a special envoy, led by Hon. Moses Kuria, the Minister for Trade, to several capitals in the promotion of the Tripartite Agenda, and specifically hasten ratification process. The commitment by

Kenya has given us renewed hope that implementation and realization of the aspirations of the Tripartite will be soon rather than later.

This meeting will also consider and adopt completed Annexes to the Tripartite Free Trade Area Agreement and instruments for guiding the implementation of the Annexes that were reviewed and approved by the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> of the Tripartite Sectoral Ministerial Committee (TSMC) for Trade, Customs, Finance, Economic Matters and Home/Internal Affairs. In addition, the meeting will consider and adopt the Tripartite Agreements on Movement of Businesspersons.

The meeting will also consider and adopt the various legal instruments approved by the 1<sup>st</sup> Meetings of the TSMC for infrastructure and Legal Affairs respectively, which have been developed under the Tripartite Transport and Transit Facilitation Programme.

**Honourable Ministers; Excellencies; Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Infrastructure and industrial development are key enablers to leverage on the opportunities that are being opened under the Tripartite market integration pillar.

Under the Infrastructure Development pillar, significant progress has been realized in developing and operationalization of transport and trade facilitation instruments. During the climax of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Member States developed the *Tripartite Guidelines for Safe Cross Border Movement of Persons and Personal Goods during the Covid-19 Pandemic*. These were consolidated from the respective RECs guidelines, to facilitate continued flow of essential goods, services, and persons, including truck drivers and medical personnel in the wake of lockdowns and physical

restriction of movements by governments. Besides, up to seven (7) legal instruments covering vehicle load, traffic and cross-border transport have been concluded.

Likewise, industrial development is critical if we have to realize inclusive and sustainable transformation of the region from low productivity economies that rely on export of unprocessed primary commodities with either little or no value addition to high competitive economies that produce and export value added products. Negotiations are, therefore underway, under this pillar to establish a Tripartite Industrial Development Coordination Unit (TIDCU) in each REC, as well as development of Tripartite Agro-processing value chain and establishment of Trade Logistics Hubs. Mobilization of resources for the implementation of the Work Programme/Roadmap under this pillar is therefore a matter of utmost urgency.

**Honourable Ministers; Excellencies; Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It will be remiss of me to reiterate the continued support by the African Development Bank through the Tripartite Capacity Building Programme – II under the market integration pillar as well as the European Union with regard to the Infrastructure development Pillar. Your support is still required more than ever before as we embark on mobilisation of additional resources for sustenance of the initiative. As you are also aware, almost all our RECs are overstretched in terms of human resources. The need for establishment of a Secretariat to oversee the coordination of the initiative cannot be over emphasised.

Let me conclude by emphasising that success in the implementation and conclusion of the commitments under the Tripartite will largely depend on the

political will and commitment among the Members States. This is the path we have all began in 2008 and it is all of us to remain true it.

On that note **Honourable Ministers; Excellencies; Ladies and Gentlemen**, let me wish your fruitful deliberations and thank you for your kind attention.