



STATEMENT BY

**THE COMESA SECRETARY GENERAL,
H E CHILESHE MPUNDU KAPWEPWE**

**AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE VIRTUAL
EXTRA-ORDINARY MEETING OF THE COMESA
INTERGOVERNMENTAL COMMITTEE**

12TH MAY 2020

Chairperson,
Distinguished Permanent/Principal Secretaries,
Distinguished Delegates,
My Colleagues Chief Executives of COMESA Institutions
My Colleagues Assistant Secretaries General
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good Morning.

It is my singular honor and privilege to have this opportunity to say a few words at the opening of this meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee.

Allow me at the very outset to point out that the advent of the corona virus starting at the end of 2019 has caused suffering in the world ranging from disease, strain on health systems, subdued production, disruption of travel and trade and deaths.

Worldwide the confirmed corona virus cases have exceeded four million and rising. In our region, by yesterday, we had 17,564 confirmed cases in our Member States, 5,224 recoveries, 11,537 active cases and 803 fatalities. While the overall numbers are still

rising, we have observed very positive developments. Some of our countries have managed to flatten the curve and few others have maintained low rate of infections. On the other hand, a majority of the countries are still recording increased numbers despite their gallant efforts to contain the pandemic. Of course, there are many dynamics that apply to each country hence the mixed fortunes that we are experiencing. I take this opportunity to once again express our solidarity and support with all our governments as you tackle the worst crisis in modern history.

Distinguished delegates

This pandemic has completely changed the way things are being done in the whole world including lockdowns, social distancing and the efficacy of digital online trading. Even if the world will eventually succeed to contain this pandemic, tremendous amounts of resources will have been deployed for this purpose and economies will have shrunk owing to subdued activity as countries try to halt the spread of the virus.

Cooperative effort on the part of all countries is needed as the world has become interconnected through technology, production and travel. In addition to coordinated efforts, a uniform application of

measures is paramount at a regional level to ensure continued trade and supply of goods and services while attending to the imperatives of public health.

Distinguished delegates

As you are all aware, COMESA together with other Regional Economic Communities and the African Union Commission set economic integration as a means of improving the living standards of our people. To that extent COMESA has continued to deploy skill and effort in designing policies and instruments to facilitate trade among its Member States and with the rest of the world.

To mention just a few achievements COMESA has liberalized trade and established a Free Trade Area in which 16 of the 21 Member States are participating; a number of transit and transport facilitation instruments have been developed and efforts have been deployed to make COMESA an attractive investment destination. Along the way COMESA has established institutions that in their various ways facilitate and promote trade.

These efforts have contributed to the rise in COMESA intra-exports from USD 1.5 billion in 2000 to USD 10.3 billion in 2018. The advent

of COVID-19 which has caused countries to implement preventive and containment measures have substantially affected intra and extra-COMESA trade by large magnitudes.

Chairperson, Ladies and gentlemen,

Extra-ordinary circumstances call for extra-ordinary measures. To fight the spread of COVID-19, Member States have introduced measures that differ in extent and severity. Some of the measures are not coordinated at a regional level thus seriously limiting trade among the countries.

To achieve regional harmony, ensure continued supply of goods and services, while at the same time addressing the public health concerns associated with the spread of COVID-19, the Secretariat has established a Task Force on COVID-19. The mandate of the Task Force is to:

- a. Develop guidelines to facilitate movement of essential goods and services across our region
- b. Develop resource mobilization plan from external sources to support Member States manage the COVID 19 pandemic;

- c. Identify immediate actions that the Secretariat can take towards support to MS;
- d. Identify counterpart organizations who can work with the Secretariat to be part of the framework above and identify specific areas of cooperation;
- e. Establish an information sharing framework and guidelines to MS on the COVID19 outbreak and mitigation mechanisms; and
- f. Identify specific areas where COMESA can offer guidelines without duplicating efforts.

Distinguished delegates

The meeting today has been called to consider the draft **Guidelines for the Movement of Goods and Services across the COMESA Region during the COVID-19 Pandemic**. It is my belief that these guidelines will go a long way in facilitating coordination and uniform application of measures across our borders while at the same time ensuring public health safety and safe trade.

As we consider these Guidelines, let us think on how best our nations and systems can re-adjust to operate in a post-COVID-19

environment. In this regard, the Secretariat will be coordinating efforts by Member States to develop recovery plans to ensure the gains already made in our integration are not totally eroded.

As I conclude, I invite this meeting to note the deliberations by the COMESA Bureau about the new COMESA Headquarters and the state of Member States contributions. These are urgent issues that could not wait. I therefore call upon the IC to take note of these two agenda items as they will form part of the substantive agenda of the extra-ordinary meeting of the Council of Ministers, which will take place on Thursday May 14, 2020.

I wish you a successful meeting.