





**Statement by  
Mr Sindiso Ngwenya at the Opening of the Meeting of the Inter  
Governmental Committee, Antananarivo, Madagascar  
10<sup>th</sup> October, 2016**

**Our Guest of Honor. Your Excellency Mr Armand Tazafy, Minister of Trade and Consumption**  
**Members of the Bureau**  
**Your Lordship, Lombe Chibesakunda, COMESA Court of Justice**  
**Distinguished Permanent / Principal Secretaries**  
**Distinguished Delegates**  
**Representative of the AU Commission**  
**Your Excellencies Ambassadors and High Commissioners and Permanent Representatives to COMESA**  
**Your Excellencies Ambassadors and Special Representatives to COMESA**  
**Representatives of International and Regional Organizations**  
**Distinguished Invited Guests**  
**Ladies and Gentlemen**

Good Morning

I have the pleasure to extend a warm welcome to all of you who have been able to make it to this important meeting which will yet again review the state of play of regional integration and come up with ways and means of strengthening and deepening mutually beneficial cooperation for the benefit of the COMESA citizens in particular and Africa in general. COMESA, as one of the eight African Union recognized Regional Economic Communities is key to the implementation of agenda 2063 and its 10 year program under the mantra of the " Africa we Want ".

I would like to take this opportunity on your behalf and indeed on my own behalf to thank the Government and the people of Madagascar for hosting this year's annual COMESA policy organs meetings. Our Guest of Honor, please kindly convey our most profound gratitude to His Excellency, Mr. Hery Rajaonarimampianina President of the Republic of Madagascar. The conference and logistic facilities place at our disposal augurs well for the success of this year's policy organs meetings.

**Our Guest of Honor**  
**Distinguished Delegates**  
**Invited Observers**

I would like to make four points during the opening session of this meeting.

Firstly , that this meeting marks a turning point in the way COMESA meetings have been organized since its establishment and that of its predecessor the Preferential Trade Area for Eastern and Southern African States( PTA) in that we have for first time deployed modern Information and Communications

Technology to run a paperless conference. Indeed, there are some of us who will feel threatened or uncomfortable with the technology. That is to be expected as disruptive technology when introduced has its birth pangs. What is, however, certain as in the case of any virtual application and systems is that once we get used to the systems they become our second nature. We indeed, live in a virtual digital world of television, telemedicine, E Commerce, Trade Facilitation, out sourcing and offshoring in production and banking to mention but a few. I would venture to say never in the history of mankind has technology made our lives and work more simpler and pleasurable than today.

It is my conviction that the introduction of a paperless conference will make us worker smarter and not harder as it will eliminate the drudgery associated with manual systems and enable us to produce reports in real time, thus putting COMESA in the same league as the private sector. I may for those who are not aware, draw attention to the fact that our mother continental body the African Union is already running paperless meetings including the AU Summits of Heads of State and Government. There are those among us who may be asking themselves the question of what are the advantages and benefits of a paperless conference which in years to come I predict will become a virtual conference. My simple response is to invite the meeting to imagine the next three days having a total number of 4,320 minutes (each day has 1440 minutes) and that each day is in effect, a time bank from which we draw our assets in minutes and hours. You will agree with me that the supply of these minutes is limited. You will further agree with me that time has no value before it is used or after it is wasted. The introduction of a paperless conference will therefore make all us worker smarter and save on time and make us accomplish more in the limited time. I would venture to say that we stand in the threshold of accomplishing more due to the following three essentials:

Firstly, we shall eliminate the unnecessary, slave -of -habit things that fritter away so much energy and time;

Secondly, the paperless conference will stop us from doing things in a hard way as it is simpler and faster and saves on resources and will enable us to go green; and

Third, it will enable us to do two or three things at once. Is it wonderful that technology can make it easier for us to be multi tasked! Muti tasking up to now has been the preserve of those who are endowed with special genes.

**Our Guest of Honor  
Distinguished Delegates  
Ladies and Gentlemen**

Allow me to conclude by making a direct link of running a paperless conference by giving a simple example of how COMESA can contribute to reducing carbon emissions. Currently for every COMESA policy organs meetings we use 1,000 reams of paper weighing 2,500 kilograms which require 60 fully grown trees to make. The carbon foot print of this paper is approximately 4,000 kilograms CO2 equivalent.

**Our Guest of Honor  
Distinguished Delegates and Invited Guests**

My second point concerns the role played by this Inter Governmental Committee of Permanent/ Principal Secretaries as provided for in Article 14 of the COMESA Treaty. The Treaty in Article 14 sub paragraph 2 provides that this Committee shall and I quote "be responsible for the development of programs and action plans in all sectors of cooperation except in the finance and monetary sector". The rhetorical question I would pose during this opening session which will be substantively addressed during the course of the meeting is; has the Inter Governmental Committee lived to its promise by developing programs and action plans? Perhaps the Committee has partially developed programs but I doubt that it has developed action plans and action plans for whom. Without preempting the debate on this matter, I would humbly suggest that it is time for the organization to review its business processes including the business model that COMESA and its predecessor the PTA has used over the years. It goes without saying that regional cooperation and integration like any development process requires continuous review and reforms to ensure not only its relevance but the capacity to deliver on its promise.

My Third point, very briefly is that it has and is becoming increasingly evident that the full implementation of the COMESA Treaty provisions require fundamental changes in the governance structures of COMESA to make it a truly member State driven and owned institution. For example, a cursory examination of the various provisions of the Treaty reveal that instead of member States taking action to implement the provisions of the Treaty, decisions are taken by Council which are even weaker than the commitments member States have made when they signed and ratified in the Treaty. It would appear to me that what is required is for each member State to self select and assign itself a specific leadership role to coordinate either sectors or sub sectors with the support of the Secretariat. This innovation will not only

enable our leaders to provide leadership but allow for peer to peer review and sharing of experiences. It is high time for COMESA to become a learning organization. A dare say that the strength of the Asian and South East Asian economies and integration arrangements has been and still is their capacity and ability to work together. In other words, these economies are learning economies that leverage and thrive on best practices. Within the COMESA family, there are member States that are emerging as global leaders in consistently implementing reforms and being learning economies on issues, such as, free movement of people, talent mobility and the ease of doing business.

### **Our Guest of Honor**

My fourth and last point is on partnership within the region between our governments and private sector and other stake holders on one hand and with sister regional organizations and international cooperating partners on the other. On this note, I would like to urge member States to ensure that there is coherence with respect to national development programs and regional integration programs and projects. With respect to Inter regional economic communities member States, particularly those that belong to multiple RECs are in an advantageous position to ensure program harmonization and joint actions to avoid duplication of effort and waste of resources. Finally, on behalf of member States I would like to thank all cooperating partners for supporting with financial and technical resources COMESA programs.

I thank you for your kind attention.