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COMESA Heads of State and Government Meet to Discuss Ways to Harness Science and Technology for Development



Lilongwe 14 October 2011- The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) Heads of State and Governments on 14th and 15th October 2011, held their 15th Summit in Lilongwe, Malawi on the theme: *“Harnessing Science and Technology for Development”*, with a call to Member States to incorporate Science and Technology in all social sectors if the region is to develop.



The Summit was attended by the African Union Commission Chairperson, Dr. Jean Ping, the AU Commissioner for Economic Affairs Dr. Maxwell Mkwezalamba and the Regional Delegate to Southern Africa Dr Salif Sada Sall, alongside five Heads of States, the outgoing Chairperson, His Majesty King Mswati III of the Kingdom of Swaziland, the host and incoming Chair Malawian President Prof. Bingu wa Mutharika, Sudanese President Omar al Bashir, President Robert Mugabe of the

Republic of Zimbabwe, President Pierre Nkurunziza of the Republic of Burundi, and Five Vice presidents from Zambia, Kenya, Seychelles, Djibouti, Union of Comoros. Ministers from other COMESA countries and the Executive Secretaries of the East African Community and the Southern African Development Community Dr. Richard Sezibera and Dr. Tomas Salamao respectively, were also present at the Summit.

The Summit witnessed the handover ceremony of the Chairmanship from the His Majesty King Mswati III of Swaziland to the Malawian President His Excellency Ngwazi Prof Bingu wa Mutharika and had the issue of the Tripartite Grand Free Trade Area by COMESA, the East African Community and the Southern African Development Community as one of the items high on the agenda.

Speaking at the ceremony, the AUC Chairperson Mr. Jean Ping expressed appreciation for the progress COMESA has attained in deepening regional integration and for taking the leadership role in continental integration. He further expressed appreciation for the excellent collaboration between the African Union Commission and COMESA in various programmes and particularly commended COMESA, EAC and SADC for initiating the Tripartite Free Trade Area which he described as a prelude to continental integration.

The Summit observed that there was quick recovery from the financial crisis in the region and attributed to various factors, including the macroeconomic stability of the COMESA region and the existence of the COMESA Free Trade Area, together with the support from key COMESA institutions such as the PTA Bank and the African Trade Insurance. The Chairperson further referred to the Summit theme saying, science and technology is vital in the integration process of Africa and must be promoted at all cost. He appealed for the ratification by COMESA Member States of the Statistics Charter which has so far been signed by 21 African Union Member States but ratified by only 2 countries.

The incoming Chair reminded the Summit that the capacity to increase intra COMESA Trade lies in the development of efficient infrastructure. He called on COMESA Member States to put more effort in attracting foreign direct investment to the region especially for infrastructure development. He informed the Summit that Malawi is ready to continue to play a leading role in the development of regional infrastructure project such as the Shire Zambezi Waterways Project which is a regional project supported by both COMESA and SADC aimed at reducing transport costs.

On the other hand, the outgoing Chairperson highlighted COMESA key achievements under various programmes including the customs union. He highlighted the importance of ensuring that a fully functional Customs Union is put in place. He expressed satisfaction to the successful launch of the COMESA-EAC-SADC Tripartite negotiations for establishment of the Tripartite Free Trade Area which he underlined, has placed the region in a better position to address the challenges it is facing and would contribute to the attainment of the African Economic Community.

In a related development, the COMESA First Ladies met at a Round Table forum and considered maternal and child health, gender equality, gender based violence, education, advocacy and science and technology issues that can facilitate the full participation of women in the COMESA economic integration agenda.

The summit was preceded with several meetings including Ministerial meetings and COMESA Business forum, Administrative and Budgetary Committee, Intergovernmental Committee, Council of Ministers and Ministers of Foreign Affairs.

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