

AFRICAN UNION

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Opening speech
for the
2nd COMESA-SADC-EAC Tripartite Summit

by H.E. Mr. Erastus Mwencha
Deputy Chairperson
of the African Union Commission

Johannesburg, 12th June 2011

Your Excellency Jacob Zuma, President of the Republic of South Africa and our gracious host

Your Majesty King Mswati III, of the Kingdom of Swaziland and Chairperson of COMESA

Your Excellency Hifikepunye Pohamba, President of the Republic of Namibia and Chairperson of SADC

Your Excellency Pierre Nkurunziza, President of the Republic of Burundi and Chairperson of EAC

Your Excellencies, Heads of State and Government

Honourable Ministers

Chief Executives of COMESA, SADC and EAC

Heads of Regional and International organisations

Members of Diplomatic Corps

Ladies and Gentlemen

1. On this historic occasion, it is an immense honour and rear privilege for me to speak on behalf of the African Union - and to bring you greetings from Chairperson Jean Ping and staff of the African Union Commission.
2. We pay tribute to you, Heads of State and Government of the three Regional Economic Communities (COMESA, SADC and EAC) for your decision to work towards the creation of a Grand Free Trade Area.
3. We congratulate the Task Force, at Ministerial, Chief Executives and Senior Officials levels for the tremendous work done in preparing the roadmap since the first Tripartite Summit in 2008.
4. We want to underline how crucial it is for the realisation of the vision of the African Union and how close it is to the hearts of many Afro-optimists as this is in line with the aspirations of African Union Constitutive Act and the Abuja Treaty of Creating an Afican Common Market.
5. By your decision in Kampala to walk together in this journey, and in taking the concrete step to-day to move forward, by launching the negotiations you are indeed translating vision and hope into reality.
6. We know that a lot of work lies ahead. We know that along the way there may be some challenges in the negotiations and in the mplimentation of the roadmap. But the reward that await us at the end of this journey is worthy of all the efforts being deployed, knowing very well that integration is not a zero-sum game but a win-win for all.
7. The process you have embarked upon will not only be of immense benefit to the three regions but also to the the entire Continent and most importantly, to the people and especially the business community.

8. By uniting the 26 countries which collectively are well endowed with vast natural resources and above all, hard-working people, and by creating a free trade corridor from Cape to Cairo and from DRC to Mauritius, you are paving the way for greater prosperity and faster integration of the Continent.
9. It is projected that in 10 years time Africa will have doubled its GDP and will have a sizable middle class to propel economic growth similar to what is now obtaining in other emerging economies.
10. At this critical moment of our history when Africa is at a tipping point of economic transformation, your efforts will change the investment landscape in addition to making feasible to attain the African Common Market sooner than currently projected. For this, we thank you.
11. It is now well documented that regional integration is one of the four key factors that have sustained Africa's growth in the last decade as well as the quick and robust recovery from the recent economic and financial crisis. The other three are high commodity prices, sound macro-economic policies and improved peace and security situation in the continent.
12. The step you are taking today will enable Africa to accelerate momentum to achieve sustainable growth and development through enhanced economies of scale which in turn will lead to competitiveness and promote value addition and employment.
13. The pragmatic approach of initially focusing on trade will enable the three Communities to harness tangible results within a reasonable time. We all know that trade can act as an engine of growth with backward as well as horizontal linkages with other sectors. For the people of Africa, this will mean a paycheck in their pocket. It will mean lifting millions

out of poverty and it will also mean enhanced peace and security in our Continent.

14. This initiative also serves as an excellent platform for accelerating implementation of continental programs, such as the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program (CAADP) and the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA). The three regional economic communities have already made progress in working together in the area of infrastructure in general and air transport in particular.
15. Your Excellencies, Heads of State and Government, let me assure you of AU's readiness to accompany you in this noble cause.

16. As I conclude, allow me to express our gratitude to our host, His Excellency Jacob Zuma, the Government and people for the excellent facilities and generous hospitality as well as the role South Africa has played on behalf of the Continent in addressing global challenges at various fora including the G20 and under the BRICS.
17. Just as your excellent hosting of the World Cup, the whole world will again be converging here in South Africa in November for the crucial Global Summit on Climate Change.

18. Your Excellencies, Heads of State and Government, I thank you for your kind attention.