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**Welcome Address by Honourable E. Kabanshi MP, Minister of
Community Development, Mother and Child Health, Republic of
Zambia, at the ECOSOCC Sensitization and Motivation Campaign for
Zambia NGOs
COMESA Conference Hall
Lusaka, Zambia, 12 August 2014**

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Your Excellency, the Assistant Secretary-General (Programs) COMESA,
Colleagues from the AU and COMESA,
Distinguished Delegates of Civil Society,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with utmost pleasure that I address this august Assembly of civil society groups gathered here in Lusaka today. The government and people of Zambia feel honored that the African Union has chosen Zambia as the trailblazer in the ECOSOCC Sensitization and Motivation Campaign. Zambia was one of the Member States of the Union that adopted Decision EX.CL/Dec.849(XXV) on ECOSOCC Elections in Malabo. Zambia has always taken interest in the people-driven character of the AU. We also have a vibrant and lively civil society culture that has impacted critically on the development of programs and policies at national, regional and continental level. Zambia is proud of its people to people culture that is evident in our development spirit. It is therefore, only appropriate that the foundation of the African people's parliament should be nourished here in Zambia.

On this note, I welcome the AU delegation as well as the African civil society community that are gathered here today to set in motion the process of establishing the 2nd ECOSOCC General Assembly. It is important that Zambian civil society should take up the challenge of effective representation in ECOSOCC as a mark of patriotism, duty and continental obligation. The challenge that faces our continent today is that of auto-centred development which requires a stakeholder society embracing all segments of the population.

The AU has created the institution of ECOSOCC as a people-oriented, people-centred and people-driven community in the African Union in which all stakeholders are effectively represented. It is therefore the entry point of a people-centred development. It is thus of concern that so far Zambia the cradle of civil society in our region and the continent at large, has not got sufficient eligible candidates for the elections. Our status is not well reflected in our conduct and embrace of obligations. This is a challenge that we must overcome and overcome effectively. I rely on your sense of duty and national and continental obligation to ensure that this is changed and changed immediately.

The Zambian civil society community has an obligation to do its duty and to put things right and thus to set the pace of our brother and sisters on the continent to follow. I urge you therefore, to listen to need the appeal of the African Union and then proceed to participate in the ECOSOCC election process with enthusiasm in a manner that will surpass all expectations. You also have the obligation to put our best organizations forward and seek effective and responsible leadership of the ECOSOCC Assembly.

Subsequently, ECOSOCC under such guidance must embrace the challenge of working with other stakeholders to promote security, development and co-operation on the continent. Our commitment to people-centred development must be interconnected at national, regional and continental levels. Civil Society must also watch itself and ensure that it takes on the mantle of leadership not just by criticism and adversarial attitudes but by embracing responsibility and showing dedication.

I urge all members of the African civil society community of Zambia to embrace this orientation here and now and work through ECOSOCC to fulfill the hopes and aspirations of our people and be able to represent them adequately.

On this note, I welcome AU colleagues once again to Zambia and wish you the very fruitful deliberations and stay in Zambia.

I thank you.