



OPENING REMARKS

BY

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TAX**

SADC EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

ON

**THE OCCASION OF THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF
THE EXTRAORDINARY SADC COUNCIL OF
MINISTERS
VIRTUAL MEETING**

23 JUNE 2020

Honourable Prof. Palamagamba John Aidan Mwaluko Kabudi, Minister of Foreign Affairs and East African Cooperation of the United Republic of Tanzania, and Chairperson of the SADC Council of Ministers;

Honourable Ministers;

Permanent Secretaries and Directors General;

SADC Deputy Executive Secretaries;

Officials from SADC Member States and SADC Secretariat Staff;

Representatives of the Media;

Ladies and Gentlemen.

May I take this opportunity to welcome you all to this extraordinary meeting of the SADC Council of Ministers.

Although we may be physically apart and confined to holding our meetings virtually, I am confident that we are certainly standing together, strong and united, as we push even further, the frontiers of the Regional Integration Agenda. We do this with greater resolve, even in the face of COVID-19, a common enemy that has imposed multiple challenges and limitations on us.

That said, allow me to start by expressing our profound gratitude to the United Republic of Tanzania, the Chairperson of SADC, for the continued leadership, and for her cooperation in organizing and hosting this important event. We are also thankful to all SADC Member States, for providing the much-needed support under these very difficult circumstances and environment. As a united regional body, we are rising up to the multiple challenges and limitations imposed on us by the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Honourable Ministers

We are operating under very difficult and challenging times in which the social-economic fabrics of Member States and the Region at large have been negatively impacted and brought under severe stress, requiring extra-ordinary measures. It is nonetheless gratifying to note that the measures and initiatives being implemented at national and regional

levels are yielding positive results in the containment of the spread of the COVID-19, and at the same time cushioning Member State economies from the debilitating effects of the impact of the Pandemic. Most importantly, the measures are lessening the impact on the wellbeing of our people. This notwithstanding, we must remain cautious, as the gains and strides we have made so far are fragile and can easily be reversed. Let us therefore not relent and become complacent, but fight even harder.

Honourable Ministers

Recognizing the need to facilitate movement of essential goods and services during the lockdowns and state of emergencies, on 6 April 2020, you approved Guidelines on the Harmonization and Facilitation of Movement of Essential Goods and Services Across Borders during the COVID-19 Pandemic. While these guidelines have played a critical role in facilitating movement of essential goods and services across borders, and Members States, and public and private actors are aligning them with their national laws and procedures, we need to address gaps that have been observed in the implementation of the guidelines. As we meet today, most Member States, like the rest of the world, are beginning to come out of the lockdowns to resume normal business and industrial operations which require normalisation of supply chains that had been disrupted by the imposition of various containment measures against the spread of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

The reopening of businesses and resumption of industrial production entails increased cross-border movements of both people and industrial goods, beyond essential goods and services. In this regard, unhindered facilitation of movement of people and industrial goods across borders is not a matter of choice, but a necessary step. As I had indicated, the guidelines on facilitation of movement of essential goods have played a critical role during this period of COVID-19 Pandemic, nonetheless, there are pending gaps that need to be addressed expeditiously, these include mutual recognition of COVID-19 testing, and validity of testing. All indications show that until a vaccine or treatment for COVID-19 is found, which might take a while, the region has to remain pragmatic and vigilant by considering both, health requirements, but also socio-economic imperatives. We need, and we must move on, and continue building our economies, while protecting the wellbeing and livelihoods of our citizens. Your meeting today is therefore, expected to critically reflect on these issues, and come up with concrete and practical measures that will facilitate safe trade, while promoting economic growth and poverty alleviation in the SADC region.

Honourable Ministers

In line with the directive of your meeting held on 29 May 2020, the Expanded Technical Committee on monitoring the implementation of the protocol on health, met and finalized the review of the regional guidelines on harmonisation and facilitation of cross border transport operations across the region; and the proposed Regional Standard Operating Procedures (SOPS) for management and monitoring of cross border road transport at designated points of entry and COVID-19 checkpoints, which will be tabled for your consideration. The guidelines aim to first and foremost balance, realign, harmonise and coordinate COVID-19 response measures with the requirements for trade and transport facilitation; secondly, to promote safe trade and transport facilitation for economic growth and poverty alleviation in the SADC region; and thirdly, to facilitate the adoption and implementation of harmonised standard operating procedures for management and monitoring of cross border road transport at designated points of entry and COVID-19 checkpoints.

Once adopted, the revised guidelines, will also facilitate the implementation of the corridor trip monitoring system for management of the registration of cross border trips through, recording, monitoring and surveillance of driver wellness; tracking of vehicles loads and drivers; contact tracing; queue management; as well as statistical analysis and reporting.

Honourable Ministers

The SADC Secretariat, continues to monitor the global and regional socio-economic landscape in light of the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic. As reported in the last Council meeting, the Pandemic has brought considerable human suffering and major disruptions to Member States economies across sectors. Let us remain united as a region and contain the negative effects of COVID-19, by among other things, ensuring continued smooth movement of goods and services, that drives industrial development, and as such socio-economic and technological transformation of our economies.

Going forward, **Honourable Ministers**, it is imperative that we come-up with home-grown solutions to reverse the downward spiral of the regional economy and revive growth. It is also important to recognize that the fight against the scourge of COVID-19 calls for a well-coordinated SADC regional approach.

As I conclude, may I once again, commend SADC Member States for the difficult decisions they are making on a daily basis and for the bold measures they are implementing to arrest the spread of the COVID-19, and reduce human suffering while minimising the damage to national economies, and the regional economy. As Secretariat, we remain committed, and will continue monitoring of the socio-economic landscape, and providing evidence-based, and timely information.

While thanking the Chairperson of Council Prof. Kabudi for his tireless efforts and guidance, allow me to also thank the Expanded Technical Committee on monitoring the implementation of the protocol on health, the SADC Secretariat staff, and the Committee of Senior Officials, for the dedication in finalizing the review of the guidelines and standard operating procedures, and as such, enabling this meeting to take place. Extensive work has been done by the experts, I have no doubt that the Council will see value in the work done, and this Council will be remembered by SADC citizens for the outstanding guidance and service that it has rendered to the region during this difficult time.

With these remarks, I look forward to a successful and fruitful meeting.

Asante Sana!
I Thank You Very Much.
Merci Beaucoup!
Muito Obrigada