



**Remarks by Her Excellency Dr. Stergomena Lawrence Tax,  
SADC Executive Secretary and Chairperson of the Tripartite  
Task Force**

**at the**

**4<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Tripartite Council of Ministers**

**30 October 2016**

**NAIROBI, KENYA**

Our Guest of Honour, Honourable Adan Mohamed, Cabinet Secretary for Industry, Trade and Cooperatives of the Republic of Kenya;

Chairperson of the Tripartite Sectoral Council, Hon Tazafy Armand, Minister of Trade and Consumption of Madagascar;

Honourable Ministers from Tripartite Member States;

Your Excellency Amb. Libérat Mfumukeko, Secretary General of the EAC;

Amb. Kipyego Cheluget, Deputy Secretary General of COMESA;

Senior Officials of the Tripartite Region;

Officials of the Task Force;

Distinguished Guests;

Representatives of the Media;

Ladies and Gentlemen.

On behalf of the Tripartite Task Force, and indeed on my own behalf, I take this opportunity to express sincere gratitude to the Government and the people of the Republic of Kenya for hosting these Tripartite Meetings taking place here in this beautiful city of Nairobi. We are grateful for the generosity and hospitality of the Government and the people of Kenya which has enabled us to conduct our meetings in a productive manner.

I also take this opportunity to extend a warm welcome to the Ministers attending this 4<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Tripartite Council of Ministers, which will consider progress made, and in doing so provide guidance on outstanding issues towards the operationalization of the Tripartite Free Trade Area.

This meeting comes approximately eighteen (18) months following your last Tripartite Sectoral Ministerial Committee meeting held in May, 2016 in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, and the June Tripartite Council, where important decisions were taken, leading to the launch of the Tripartite Free Trade Area in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt in June 2015. A built-in agenda was adopted at the time, which was to be expeditiously finalized in order to fully operationalize the Free Trade Area. Since then, negotiators and experts have met several times, at Technical Working Group, Tripartite Trade Negotiations Forum and Senior Officials meetings, guided by the Tripartite Sectoral Ministerial Committee, specifically focusing on outstanding Phase 1 issues, with a determination to address outstanding issues on the built-in agenda, and ensure the TFTA is fully operational. These negotiations and meetings have resulted into substantial progress.

**Honorable Ministers,**

Although the report covers the three pillars of the Tripartite developmental agenda: Infrastructure Development, which is aimed at enhancing connectivity and reduction of costs of doing business, as well as the Industrial Development pillar, which is aimed at addressing productive capacity constraints in Tripartite Member/Partner States, specific attention is placed on the market integration pillar with a deliberate intention to expeditiously operationalize the TFTA.

Since the launch of the TFTA in June 2015, progress has been made in the following areas:

- Six Annexes on Non-Tariff Barriers; Trade Facilitation; Customs Cooperation and Mutual Administrative Assistance; Transit Trade and Transit Facilitation; Technical Barriers to Trade and Sanitary and Phyto-Sanitary Measures, which define the scope and elements of cooperation in the respective areas, have been

finalized and legally scrubbed. Once adopted by your Council, these become an integral part of the Tripartite Free Trade Area Agreement;

- The Framework for Cooperation and Work Programme on Industrial Development have also been completed. These instruments are the basis for cooperation within the Industrial Development Pillar, and a result of concerted efforts that have taken into account key elements of regional industrial policies and strategies in the three RECs, while ensuring complementarity, in order to achieve the intended goal of industrializing our region and ultimately, the African continent. The Framework and Work Programme will be presented for your approval during this meeting;
  
- Significant progress has also been made on outstanding issues on rules of origin, where Member/Partner States have agreed on most of the applicable definitions and rules, which were unresolved during your meeting in June 2015. With the understanding reached, the Annex on Rules of Origin will be submitted for legal scrubbing, and will provide an interim arrangement to determine origin and confer the necessary preferential treatment on goods originating from the Tripartite Member/Partner States as soon as the Agreement enters into force.
  
- It is nonetheless important to note that sectors such as Textiles and Clothing, which could boost manufacturing, expand industrial activity and job opportunities in the Tripartite, remain on the list of unfinished business. Efforts must therefore be made by the negotiators to expedite the remaining work, in order to

ensure a comprehensive, fully functional and beneficial Tripartite trade regime.

- Regarding tariff negotiations, although no offers have been finalized so far, it is encouraging to note that there is high level of commitment by Member/Partner States to complete negotiations on tariff offers.

### **Honourable Chairperson,**

While acknowledging that progress has been inordinately slower than expected, with the renewed vigor, there is hope that the Tripartite Free Trade Area will soon be operational. **At the stage now reached, dedicated efforts must be placed on the finalization of exchange of offers, signing and ratification of the TFTA Agreement, and in doing so operationalize the TFTA.**

While Member States continue with the signing and ratification of the Agreement, the Task Force will undertake the necessary preparatory work to ensure that all the administrative requirements necessary for the functioning of the TFTA are in place, so as to avoid any delays in granting preferential market access to Tripartite goods when the Agreement enters into force.

### **Honorable Ministers**

It is almost a year and half since the Tripartite Free Trade Area was launched. **We therefore need to walk the talk, operationalize the FTA, and allow the private sector and Tripartite citizens in particular, enjoy the benefits of this new creation. With commitment and deliberate efforts, the TFTA can be operational in less than a year from now. The Tripartite region, the African continent and the international partners await to see if our political ambitions for cooperation and integration can be matched**

**with practical and timely actions.** Completing the Tripartite FTA negotiations will also be key in defining our positions for the Continental Free Trade Area negotiations which will soon be gaining momentum to comply with the AU Heads of State Summit decision, regarding the conclusion of the negotiations establishing the Continental Free Trade Area in 2017.

**Honorable Ministers,**

The Task Force also continues to coordinate implementation of work under the Infrastructure Pillar, and as you will note, a number of projects are currently taking place with the support of our partners. We acknowledge that there is need to improve coordination of this critical pillar, and we shall endeavor, as a matter of urgency, to take necessary steps to convene a meeting of the Tripartite Sectoral Committee on Infrastructure to streamline the Work Programme under this pillar.

In conclusion, allow me to extend my sincere gratitude to my colleagues, Members of the Task Force, Dr. Sindiso Ngwenya, Secretary General of COMESA, and Amb. Liberat Mfumukeko, Secretary General of the EAC and our Teams for the dedication to the process and support extended to me during my tenure as Chairperson of the Task Force. As I am about to handover to Ambassador Mfumukeko, allow me to wish him success and assure him of my unwavering support.

I greatly thank Honourable Ministers for your continued guidance and commitment, and the Senior Officials for your diligence and hard work.

I thank you.