

**SPEECH BY HON. PROF. PALAMAGAMBA J.A. M. KABUDI (MP),
MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND EAST AFRICAN
COOPERATION OF THE UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA AND
CHAIR OF THE SADC COUNCIL OF MINISTERS DURING THE
OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE EXTRA-ORDINARY SADC COUNCIL
OF MINISTERS VIRTUAL MEETING**

DATE: 23RD JUNE, 2020

**JULIUS NYERERE INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION CENTRE (JNICC)
DAR ES SALAAM, TANZANIA**

Honorable Ministers;

Honorable Deputy Ministers;

Dr. Stergomena Lawrence Tax, Executive Secretary of SADC; Permanent Secretaries; Senior Officials and SADC Secretariat Staff; Representatives of the Media; Invited Guests; Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good Afternoon!

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you all to this Extra- Ordinary SADC Council of Ministers Virtual Meeting. Allow me to thank my fellow Ministers for once again honouring the region by participating in this august meeting.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

I wish to register my sincere gratitude and appreciation to Dr. Stergomena Lawrence Tax, Executive Secretary and the entire SADC Secretariat for their outstanding contribution in coordinating SADC activities particularly at this critical time that the region is still dealing with COVID-19 pandemic.

Honourable Ministers,

As you will recall, during our last Council of Ministers virtual meeting held on 29th May 2020, among other decisions, we directed the Expanded Technical Committee on Health to meet and finalise the revised Regional Guidelines on Harmonisation and Facilitation of Cross Border Transport Operations across the Region; and the Regional Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for Management and Monitoring of Cross Border Road Transport at Designated Points of Entry and COVID-19 Checkpoints.

I am very delighted to inform this Council that the Technical Team responsible for monitoring the implementation of SADC Protocol of Health has completed its task of reviewing the SADC Guidelines and its annexes on standard operating procedures for cross border transport operations, which we the Ministers are asked to approve today.

Honourable Ministers,

As most countries and regions around the globe are still facing a public health emergency of international concern caused by COVID -19 pandemic, our region has continued to exhibit its determination and solidarity as we strive to address and contain the COVID-19 pandemic.

Honourable Ministers,

I believe you will agree with my surmation that, this pandemic is likely not to end in the short term and the Region will have to practice safe trade and transport facilitation for economic growth and prosperity of our people while managing containing the spread of COVID-19. It is in that regard, I wish to commend some SADC Member States for their pragmatic decision to open up and resume economic and social activities including opening schools and groceries while observing all the necessary measures and precaution against the spread of COVID-19.

Honourable Ministers,

As I hinted in my 29th May speech that while we take measures to contain

the pandemic, we should be reminded that, the very aim of our integration among others is to boost intra- regional trade and creation of jobs for our people. Solidarity is a struggle for our freedom and prosperity is what inspired and drove our Founding Fathers to establish this community.

Honourable Ministers,

While I commend our solidarity, commitment and strength exhibited since the outbreak of COVID- 19, permit me to inform that recently it has been observed with great concern that sometimes Member States react unilaterally in implementing protective measures, which are increasingly disrupting inter-state trade and transport. Further, Freight Transport Operators and Drivers often feel unfairly treated including higher transport costs and delays in cargo delivery.

Honourable Ministers,

It has been also observed that there are inconsistencies in communication in terms of applicable measures in each country. Announcements of policies and regulations are made without prior notice and sometimes, there is conflicting information from different agencies at the local border management level and between the local border and head offices. While mandatory testing of all truck drivers at borders could be an ideal and desirable, it has however, exposed the challenges of insufficient testing capacity, lack of harmonisation of types of tests and testing protocols and lack of mutual recognition of test results.

Honourable Ministers,

I would like at this juncture, to reiterate and underscore the point I made during our last virtual meeting that, indeed, we are all up in arms fighting the invisible enemy with the aim of protecting the citizens of our respective countries. It is equally important to also recognise as the Region and Community that drivers do play a crucial role for the transportation of goods and services for our people and region's survival. Therefore, stigmatisation of commercial truck drivers as carriers of COVID-19 will not help but it will only deny our people and services that they desperately

need. Legally drivers viewed as the cause of spread of COVID -19 around borders. Indeed while it is legitimate to take measure but no need to treat drivers with the dignity and respect they deserve as human being.

Honourable Ministers,

As we deliberate on the agenda and consider the Guidelines, I wish to remind this august Council a number of issues that need to be scrutinised and agreed upon. These issues include but not limited to the following:- types of test to be used for testing drivers/pilots/crew before they commence their cross-border trips, the designated testing facilities, mutual recognition of the test results, the period of validity of negative test results, what to do with drivers/crew/pilots/person when the COVID-19 test result is positive and what to do when the negative results expire while not in home-country.

Other important elements of the Guidelines that we need to agree upon is the providing of information in relation with the truck stop points drivers/crews can use on the designated routes on the corridors and services available in such locations. These services include fueling, catering and sanitation facilities. Simply put, Guidelines have to therefore, allow movement of goods and services for normal economic activities and not just essential goods.

Honorable Ministers,

I have highlighted these issues to remind the Region the need to remain committed, sincere and firm in implementing the decisions we make as one community. I do not intend to over- emphasise the magnitude and how deadly COVID-19 pandemic is. It suffices to say that the challenges we are facing as a Region are real, require urgent, practical and collective measures. We need to continue to work together to address its negative economic and social impact now for the better future.

As SADC, we need also to work with other partners including our Tripartite that is COMESA, EAC and SADC so that we can come up with minimum guidelines and standard operating procedures for cross border transport operations during this period. It is equally important that the Region practices safe trade and transport facilitation for economic growth and

poverty alleviation, while containing the spread of the virus.

Honorable Ministers,

Our history and record of defeating our common enemies is clear. We have done that in the past and together this time around we can withstand and contain COVID-19 pandemic. We have the leadership and wisdom. What is needed is standing together and fight the pandemic as one family and largely we have demonstrated that.

Honourable Ministers,

As I conclude, allow me to thank Senior officials for their excellent work in the preparation of this meeting. Their hard working and arrangement have made this meeting very possible. Once again, I thank you Honourable Ministers for attending this meeting that is very crucial to our Region. I am confident that the meeting will prudently deliberate on the agenda and come out with decisions needed by our region.

I thank you so much for your kind attention.

Asante Sana, Muito Obrigada, Merci Beaucoup.