



REPUBLIC OF KENYA

**ACCEPTANCE REMARKS BY HIS EXCELLENCY HON.
WILLIAM SAMOEI RUTO, PhD, C.G.H., PRESIDENT OF
THE REPUBLIC OF KENYA AND COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF
OF THE DEFENCE FORCES, ON ASSUMING THE
CHAIRMANSHIP OF THE COMMON MARKET FOR
EASTERN AND SOUTHERN AFRICA (COMESA) AT THE
24TH SUMMIT OF HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT**

OCTOBER 9, 2025

KICC, NAIROBI



**Your Excellency Evariste Ndayishimiye,
President of the Republic of Burundi and outgoing Chair
of the COMESA Authority,
Your Excellencies, Heads of State and Government,
Distinguished Ministers,
Excellencies, Members of the Bureau of the COMESA
Authority,
Your Excellency Mahmoud Ali Youssouf, Chairperson of
the African Union Commission,
Her Excellency Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe, Secretary-
General of COMESA,
His Excellency Wamkele Mene, Secretary-General of the
AfCFTA,
Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

1. It is with profound gratitude, humility, and a deep sense of purpose that I stand before you today as the new chair of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA).
2. I thank you for the trust you have placed in me and in the people of the Republic of Kenya to lead this great regional organisation, one that remains a cornerstone of Africa's economic transformation and a model for continental integration under the African Union.
3. Allow me to pay special tribute to my brother and friend, His Excellency President Evariste Ndayishimiye of the Republic of Burundi. Your Excellency, under your wise and steady leadership, COMESA has registered remarkable progress.



4. You have advanced our shared vision of integration and cooperation with diligence and dedication. For this, we owe you our collective appreciation and deep respect.
5. Excellencies, I assume this responsibility under the inspiring theme, 'Leveraging Digitalisation to Deepen Regional Value Chains for Sustainable and Inclusive Growth'.
6. Indeed, it is my firm conviction that the future of our prosperity, and our rightful place in the global economy, will be defined by how effectively we harness the transformative power of digital technology. For far too long, Africa has been a passive recipient and consumer of technology. The time has come for us to become producers, innovators, and exporters of digital solutions, shaping our own economic destiny.
7. In Kenya, the story of M-Pesa is a vivid example of the power of local innovation - a simple idea, born from necessity and nurtured by ingenuity, that revolutionised financial inclusion for millions. This is the spirit of African innovation we must now ignite and scale across our region.
8. We must move decisively to digitalise every aspect of trade facilitation by investing jointly in physical and digital infrastructure, modern transport corridors, regional data centres, and secure cloud services.



9. This digital superhighway, Excellencies, must not end in our capitals. It must reach every village, connect every farmer, empower every entrepreneur, and link our landlocked nations to the arteries of global trade.
10. Equally, we must harmonise our digital policies and regulatory frameworks. Fragmentation is itself a non-tariff barrier. A single digital market for COMESA will require common standards for e-commerce, digital payments, data protection, and cybersecurity.
11. Let us therefore accelerate the adoption of electronic Certificates of Origin, integrated Single Window Systems, and interoperable cross-border payment platforms to make our region the most efficient place to trade on the continent.
12. Excellencies, at the same time, we must now leap into the Fourth Industrial Revolution - Industry 4.0 - by integrating automation, artificial intelligence, and advanced manufacturing.
13. This is how we will transform our rich mineral and agricultural resources into high-value finished products within COMESA, creating quality jobs, boosting incomes, and expanding our economies.
14. Digital solutions in logistics, including real-time cargo tracking, smart port management, and AI-driven supply chain systems, will reduce transit times, cut costs, and enhance transparency in our trade networks, making COMESA the most efficient and attractive trading region in Africa.



15. Ladies and gentlemen, the attainment of our development objectives hinges on access to equitable, affordable, and sustainable financing, mechanisms that promote inclusive growth and long-term transformation and not cycles of debt and dependency.
16. As I noted during my recent address to the United Nations General Assembly, the global financial system remains trapped in the architecture of a bygone era. Institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank, conceived in the aftermath of the Second World War 80 years ago, continue to be dominated by wealthy nations, resulting in persistent inequities and a limited voice for developing countries.
17. In response, one of the most viable pathways for Africa, and for regional economic blocs like COMESA, is to strengthen our homegrown multilateral financial institutions such as the Trade and Development Bank (TDB), Afreximbank, Africa Finance Corporation (AFC), Shelter Afrique, Africa Re, the African Trade and Investment Development Insurance (ATIDI), and ZEP-RE. These institutions embody our collective determination to mobilise African capital for African priorities.
18. We may recall that the Trade and Development Bank was established under the Preferential Trade Area (PTA), the precursor to COMESA, and has since evolved into the financial arm of our common market, driving regional trade, investment, and sustainable development.



19. That is why, here in Kenya, we are backing our words with action. Having already committed \$50 million as share capital to Afreximbank, we are now making an additional \$100 million investment to enhance our shareholding in TDB.
20. These African-led banks are proving to be true partners in progress. Through our participation, Kenya can now access long-term facilities of up to 25 years at interest rates as low as 2%, tangible proof that investing in our own institutions yields real, sustainable value.
21. By strengthening and capitalising these entities, we are deepening regional financial integration and ensuring that Africa's development is financed on terms that reflect our realities, our priorities, and our aspirations.
22. Excellencies, intra-COMESA trade, though improving, still accounts for a small share of our total trade. Africa contributes only 3% to global trade, and only 14% to intra-Africa trade. We must move from competition to collaboration, from exporting raw materials to building value chains that retain wealth within our borders.
23. At the same time, the question of continental integration must go beyond trade agreements and shared markets. It must also embrace the free movement of people, goods, and services across our borders. True integration will only be achieved when an African can travel, work, and invest freely anywhere on the continent.



24. It is in this spirit that Kenya has taken the progressive decision to become visa-free for most African nationals, affirming our belief that Africa's strength lies in its openness and unity. We are optimistic that our sister countries across the continent will take similar bold steps so that, together, we may unlock the full potential of a borderless, connected, and prosperous Africa.
25. Ladies and gentlemen, our growth must be inclusive, uplifting micro, small, and medium enterprises, empowering women and youth, and ensuring that every citizen becomes a stakeholder in our shared prosperity.
26. Equally important, sustainability must be central to our development model. We are stewards of a rich natural heritage, and we owe it to future generations to pursue growth that protects our environment.
27. Excellencies, all these ambitions rest on unshakable foundations: Peace, security, and stability. There can be no development without peace, and no investment without stability. We must therefore strengthen our collective capacity to prevent conflict, manage disputes peacefully, and uphold democracy, good governance, and the rule of law. This must remain our highest and most sacred duty.



28. The Government and people of Kenya are ready to play their part. In accepting the chairmanship of this great common market, I pledge to serve as a dedicated, energetic, and collaborative partner, working with each of you to advance the COMESA vision of shared prosperity, integration, and transformation.

29. Together, we can build a COMESA that is digital, dynamic, and deeply inclusive, a bloc that truly reflects the promise of a rising Africa.

I thank you.
Asanteni sana.

###

