



**STATEMENT BY
HER EXCELLENCY CHILESHE MPUNDU KAPWEPWE, COMESA
SECRETARY GENERAL TO THE 24th COMESA SUMMIT OF HEADS
OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT**

9th OCTOBER 2025

NAIROBI, KENYA

***Theme: “Leveraging digitalization to deepen Regional Value Chains
for Sustainable and Inclusive Growth”***

Your Excellency, Dr William Samoei Ruto, C.G.H,
President of the Republic of Kenya *and Chairperson of the COMESA Authority.*

Your Excellency, Mr Emmerson Mnangagwa, *President of the Republic of Zimbabwe and Vice Chairperson of the COMESA Authority.*

Your Excellency, Mr Evariste Ndayishimiye,
President of the Republic of Burundi, *Outgoing Chairperson and Rapporteur of The COMESA Authority.*

Your Excellencies, Heads of State and Government.

Your Excellency Mahmoud Ali Youssouf, Chairperson of The African Union Commission. A special welcome as you attend our Summit for the first time as Chairperson of AUC.

Honourable Ministers

The Secretary General of the Africa Continental Free Trade, His Excellency Mr Wamkele Mene

Former COMESA SGs, Erastus Mwencha / Sindiso Ngwenya

Your Excellencies Ambassadors and High Commissioners.

Representatives of Private Sector institutions

Distinguished Guests

Members of the Press,

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is with the utmost honour and a deep sense of responsibility that I welcome you all to Nairobi for the 24th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA).

This summit brings together leaders and stakeholders from the region, whose presence today is a powerful affirmation of our unity, our shared pursuit of regional integration, and our unwavering commitment to inclusive prosperity.

I wish to take this opportunity to congratulate the newly elected members of the bureau of the authority, His excellency, Dr William Samoei Ruto, C.G.H, President of the republic of Kenya as Chairperson; His Excellency, Mr Emmerson Mnangagwa, President of the Republic of Zimbabwe as Vice Chairperson, and His Excellency, Mr Evariste Ndayishimiye, President of the Republic of Burundi, as Rapporteur.

Your Excellency, President Ruto, our gracious host, I wish to take this opportunity to pay a special tribute to you, your government and the people of Kenya. Your election as Chairperson of the COMESA Authority, Your Excellency, is indeed a clear testimony of confidence and an endorsement of Kenya's commitment and support to the regional integration agenda of COMESA. I commend Kenya for its readiness, exceptional hospitality, and professional approach in support of the successful hosting of this event.

Excellencies, Hon Ministers, distinguished guests

I also wish to acknowledge the support and guidance that I have received from the outgoing Chairperson of the COMESA Authority, His Excellency, Mr Evariste Ndayishimiye, President of the Republic of Burundi, who has been at the helm of COMESA during the past twelve months.

Your Excellency, during your tenure, COMESA attained several economic integration milestones. For instance, significant progress has been made in facilitating intra-regional trade through various interventions, including customs border management, simplifying clearances procedures and digitalization of trading instruments. In addition, The Regional Food Balance Sheet initiative has been expanded as well as enhancing targeted value addition and competitiveness of local products. Your keynote address and your statement during the launch of the Annual Report are rich with COMESA's accomplishments during the tenure of your office as Chairperson of the Authority. I also thank your government and people of Burundi for all the support they have given to COMESA and indeed to me.

This year's summit theme, "***Leveraging Digitalization to Deepen Regional Value Chains for Sustainable and Inclusive Growth***," holds special resonance. It reflects COMESA's vision to harness technology for economic transformation, empowerment of our people, and to foster a resilient future. This is especially so given the existing global trade policy uncertainties, with rising protectionism and geoeconomic confrontations, which lead to increased tariffs and trade barriers thereby disrupting supply chains and increasing the cost of doing business.

In line with the COMESA Treaty, economic integration remains at the very core of our programmes and activities. With 16 members operating under

the free trade area (FTA), COMESA boasts of achieving about 80% market integration. Intra-COMESA Trade has increased to \$14 billion in 2024 from a mere \$2 billion in the year 2000. We have and continue to develop trade facilitation instruments critical to operationalize the FTA regime.

Excellencies, Hon Ministers and distinguished guests

We are also moving with speed to digitalize every aspect of our trade facilitation instruments and in the construction of world-class physical and digital infrastructure. For instance, the \$2.5 billion COMESA–World Bank Digital Acceleration Programme is actively rolling out in 2025, targeting the connection of 180 million people and digital services for at least 100 million more by 2030. This initiative prioritizes access for women, youth, refugees, businesses, and public agencies. Besides, the Africa Cloud Ecosystem project is a first of its kind, delivering reliable and affordable cloud services for crucial sectors like agriculture, health, and education. We are sparing no *effort to simplify trade processes, reduce barriers, and connect businesses across borders, thereby deepening regional value chains and increasing intra-COMESA trade and investment.*

Positioning the region as an attractive investment hub on the continent is one of our top priorities. FDI to COMESA surged by 154% to USD65 billion in 2024, the strongest among the African economic blocs. Out of the USD 100 billion FDI that reached Africa in 2024, 65% was directed to the COMESA Region. We need to further increase the FDI by at least 25 to 30 % by utilizing COMESA Institutions such Trade and Development Bank,

ZEPRE reinsurance, ATIDI, COMESA Competition Commission and others who directly participate in various sectors.

Social inclusion and gender equity remain of critical importance. The empowering of women and youth who represent more than sixty per cent of the African population continues to be our priority. Skills training is being provided to women in business as we encourage women and youth to take on leadership roles and participate in decision making processes to promote gender and equality.

COMESA remains steadfast in advancing environmental sustainability and climate resilience. Highlights of the past year include a successful continental dialogue with the African Union Commission on carbon markets and climate finance, alongside practical interventions in resilience-building that have elevated institutional capacity, improved negotiation readiness at global climate summits, and fostered alignment between climate action and sustainable development.

In parallel, COMESA has spearheaded modernization efforts in agriculture and food security by expanding smart technology, deploying real-time analytics, and investing in green infrastructure, while the adoption of region-wide frameworks has fortified climate resilience and stabilized food markets. The Regional Food Balance Sheet (RFBS), now covering more countries and crops, is empowering decision-makers and smallholders alike with actionable, validated data for crop planning, early warning, and transparent

trade decisions. Combined with advances in livestock, blue economy, pharmaceuticals, and industry, these integrated programmes have strengthened value chains, improved market access and standards, and fast-tracked investment reforms, driving COMESA's journey towards an inclusive, resilient, and sustainable regional economy.

Excellencies, Hon Ministers and distinguished guests

This Summit was preceded by the 18th High-Level COMESA Business Forum, which convened policymakers, regional business leaders, and development partners to forge strategic partnerships and advance a vision for sustainable, inclusive growth grounded in digitalization, regional value chains, and expanded opportunities for MSMEs, women, and youth. Public-private dialogue prioritized cross-border mobility, harmonized regulations, and investment-friendly policies, laying a solid foundation for deeper collaboration and transformative actions. In addition, the COMESA Business Council also co hosted with the EU, the COMESA – EU Connect which brought together EU buyers and COMESA producers in the horticulture sector. This was a clear demonstration of COMESA's practical support to increase market access and develop value chains for our Member States.

On the peace and security agenda, the 20th Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs held on 8 October 2025 reviewed the progress made in the implementation of various programmatic activities towards promoting peace and security. The meeting noted the progress made in the implementation in various programmatic areas which included conflict prevention and

management, the countering of violent extremism and terrorism, combating money laundering and financing of terrorism, and support to post-conflict reconstruction and development.

In our deliberations, let us confront persistent obstacles such as overdependence on ODA, delay in delivering commitments, slow ratification and implementation of trade policy instruments, and the digital divide with renewed commitment and collective resolve. Let us be bold in reform, diligent in execution, and innovative in cultivating partnerships, including our relationships with the African Union, European Union, World Bank, African Development Bank, Regional Economic Communities and other global and continental partners.

Excellencies, Hon Ministers and distinguished guests

As I conclude, I would like to once again, extend my gratitude to you, your excellencies, and to each and every one for supporting me and the Secretariat, in discharging our responsibilities and mandate, to ensure that our goals are realized. Let us seize this historic moment to drive the digital agenda, build resilient value chains, encourage free movement of businesspersons and champion sustainable and inclusive growth for the COMESA region.

I thank you for your attention, your dedication, and your vision for a bright future for our Common Market.

