



Statement

by

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Special Representative of India to COMESA

To the 34th Meeting of COMESA Council of Ministers

(Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 26-27 March 2015)

Your Excellency Chairperson of the 34th Meeting of the COMESA Council of Ministers

Your Excellency Mr. Sindiso Ngwenya, Secretary General of COMESA

Distinguished Delegates of COMESA Member States

My colleagues from the Diplomatic Corps and the COMESA Secretariat

Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is an honour to address this august meeting of distinguished Delegates from the member-states of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA).

At the outset, I would like to reiterate the high importance that India attaches to its relations with member states of the COMESA. We enjoy warm and friendly relations with COMESA member states, a relationship that is predicated on India's long history of association with Africa and its deep-seated, close and brotherly relations with the countries of Africa. We, therefore, attach great importance to the role the COMESA is playing in deepening regional integration and fostering economic development.

Hon'ble Chairperson and Excellencies:

India lauds and supports COMESA's objective of promoting economic prosperity and deepening regional integration. We have been closely following developments within the COMESA since its inception in 1994. From humble beginnings, COMESA is making steady progress in enhancing regional trade and bringing about closer regional economic integration. COMESA has also shown the way forward by encouraging member states to eliminate non-tariff barriers such as import licensing requirement, lifting foreign exchange restrictions, the removal of import and export quotas, the easing of customs formalities and, the improved functioning of border posts.

India views these developments as measures that will increase intra-regional trade. We are also following with interest the progress towards concluding a Tripartite FTA between the COMESA-EAC-SADC. Once established, the COMESA-EAC-SADC Tripartite FTA would constitute the largest FTA in Africa.

Hon'ble Chairperson and Excellencies:

India is committed to building upon the longstanding friendship and partnership between India and Africa. To this end, India has initiated, through the India-Africa Forum Summits, a mechanism to enhance the India-Africa development partnership. Steps taken under this mechanism are, inter alia, grant of Lines of Credit (totalling US\$5 billion); capacity building programmes (more than 22,000 scholarships to Africa over the period of next three years); and establishment of more than 80 capacity building institutions in Africa. India views the India-Africa Forum Summit as an example of South-South cooperation for a mutually beneficial and cooperative relationship.

Hon'ble Chairperson and Excellencies:

The 2003 MOU between India and COMESA forms the basis of India's cooperation with the COMESA. India remains committed to work towards further enhancing this relationship and deepening our cooperation.

In the preceding decade, India-COMESA relations have progressed steadily. This is evidenced by the signing of an MOU between the COMESA Business Council (CBC) and the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) in March 2009. The MOU provides a framework for promoting cooperation between CBC and CII in the areas of trade, investment and technology. Relations have also been marked by a steady stream of bilateral visits and exchanges. Delegations from COMESA have been attending various commercial events in India. Most recently, COMESA was present at the 3rd Indian Engineering Sourcing Show that was held in Mumbai earlier this year. A three-member COMESA delegation visited India in August 2014 for the Third India-Regional Economic Communities (RECs) meeting.

The EXIM Bank of India has also been providing credit lines to PTA Bank for utilisation for projects in the COMESA countries. Till date, a total of US\$ 65 million has thus been provided. On the trade front, India-COMESA trade continues to grow and now stands at around US\$ 8 billion, up from US\$ 5.5 billion in 2007.

We are confident that India's offer to grant unilateral preferential market access for exports from 34 LDCs in Africa, combined with the MOU between the CII and CBC, would further boost India-COMESA trade.

Hon'ble Chairperson and Excellencies:

India and COMESA are also working towards concluding a Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA). A meeting was held between the COMESA Secretariat and India's Department of Commerce, on 21st August, 2014 at New Delhi. We are happy to note that COMESA's response on Chapters 1-4 of the draft Report has been received. During the

New Delhi meeting, it was also agreed that the two sides would discuss in detail Chapter-6 of the JSG (on Economic Modeling), particularly with reference to issues of data and whether to go for partial equilibrium or general equilibrium. It was felt that some technical experts may like to participate in this dialogue. This would help both sides to draw conclusions for Chapter-7.

Pursuant to a decision taken at its 33rd meeting in Lusaka last October, the COMESA's Inter-governmental Committee had requested member states to convey the areas in which they wish to cooperate with India. We have noted that at this the 34th meeting, these submissions have been received and areas for cooperation have been identified. I shall be conveying these to the concerned authorities in India. We look forward to the early convening of the next meeting of the JSG so that these issues can be progressed. We hope that we can thereafter move on to the remaining chapters. India believes that early conclusion of these documents would lead to further cementing the India-COMESA partnership.

In conclusion, allow me Hon'ble Chairperson and Your Excellencies, to once again assure you of India's continued commitment towards a multi-dimensional and wide ranging India-Africa partnership. We shall continue to support COMESA's initiatives and its efforts in realizing its future goals.

Thank you
