



## **Statement**

*By*

**H.E. Dr Stergomena L Tax  
Executive Secretary**

**Handover of EAC-COMESA-SADC Tripartite Task Force  
(TTF) Chairpersonship**

**6 July 2015**

**Gaborone  
Botswana**

**My Brother Sindiso Ngwenya  
Secretary General of COMESA  
My Deputy Executive Secretaries and Directors  
Senior Officials from SADC and COMESA  
Members of the Media**

I would like to welcome you and your staff very warmly to Gaborone, the home of SADC.

I would like to particularly appreciate your effort in finding time to travel here for the handover of COMESA-EAC-SADC Tripartite Task Force (TTF) Chairpersonship. These are very busy times for all of us and I really want to thank you that you could come in person. Your presence today gives us an important opportunity to also discuss some of the critical issues regarding the Tripartite face to face.

The holding of the third COMESA-EAC-SADC Tripartite Summit and especially the launching of the Tripartite Free Trade Area (TFTA), was rightfully hailed all round as a huge milestone, not only for the Tripartite region but also for the whole of Africa and beyond. The just launched COMESA-EAC-SADC Tripartite Free Trade Area offers an integrated market of 26 countries, with a combined GDP of US\$1.300 trillion (2014), combined population of 625 million people, which is 57% of Africa's population and a total landmass of 17.3 million sq. km. This is a tremendous achievement, and indeed a big market. We are therefore required to ensure that all the needed prerequisites are put in place, and pending activities are finalized in order to enable an effective and functioning TFTA.

Furthermore, the fact that 16 of the 26 Member/Partner States signed the TFTA Agreement upon launching is indicative of the commitment of our leaders at the highest political level towards integration and economic development of the Tripartite region.

Nonetheless, we know that there are some significant activities that require our deliberate efforts. First among these is to ensure that the political harvest of the signing of the TFTA will now be translated into effective implementation. This will require, amongst others that we get the remaining Member States, some of whom are major players, to also sign the Tripartite Agreement.

At the same time, we will need to ensure that ratification of the TFTA by the required majority of Member States is completed expeditiously so that the Agreement enters into force. It is clear that if these processes are overly delayed, this may have implications on the promise and potential of this grand project, not only for the Tripartite region but also for the Continental Free Trade Area.

The second area follows directly from the above. There is need for Member/Partner States to expeditiously resolve the outstanding Phase 1 issues, in particular tariff offers and rules of origin, as well as the legal scrubbing of the remaining Annexes. This is because there are some countries that have linked these processes together. In the absence of these two pillars, the full value addition and potential of the Tripartite will remain unrealized and unharnessed.

As we know, Tripartite Heads of State and Government also directed the launching of negotiations on Phase 2 issues which include trade in services, competition policy, intellectual property rights and that work on the other pillars, namely the industrial and infrastructure development pillars should be expedited. This raises stakes and work load before us, especially taking into account that such issues as trade in services and other trade related matters remain controversial with insignificant progress within our own individual RECs.

This work will require substantial TTF support, both in terms of technical requirements and administrative and logistical needs. We will rely on our officials, not only the SADC Secretariat now as TTF Chair, but amongst all, the three of us working as one and constituent members of the Task Force to advance this work.

I count on your continued support and cooperation as outgoing TTF Chair as well as your insights as one who has been longest in this process amongst the three of us for the success of this process.

The biggest activity ahead of us is the need to expeditiously mobilize the required resources to support the Tripartite. With the pressure to expedite the implementation of the Sharm el Sheikh package, we have to address the fact that resources available do not match up to the challenge and the ambitious work programme of the Post-Signature Roadmap. I trust that our officials and the three RECs will work faster to explore and propose options for mobilizing the necessary resources as we had assigned them previously during our Malabo meeting.

I am grateful for the positive and successful engagement that you have facilitated by your presence here today and look forward to our TTF encounter with our brother Dr Sezibera, the Secretary General of EAC, to progress our work programme.

I therefore take this honor to accept and assume the chair person's office and take it as a privilege to serve the Tripartite in this role.

**I thank you**