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## **14<sup>TH</sup> CBC BOARD ENGAGES COMESA SECRETARY GENERAL ON CROSS BORDER CHALLENGES FACED BY INDUSTRY DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**



L-R: Mr. Marday Venkatasamy, Chairperson of the CBC Board; Ms. Chileshe Kapwepwe, Secretary General, COMESA; and Dr. Amany Asfour, past Chair of the CBC Board share a moment at a previous CBC Board of Directors Meeting.

**Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> May 2020, Lusaka** – *“In light of the various disruptions to business and supply chains across the region due to COVID-19, it is crucial that we support regional production and trade of essential supplies such as masks and sanitizers; furthermore, address the challenges regarding air cargo logistics within COMESA.”* This was said by Mr. Marday Venkatasamy, the CBC Chairperson at the 14<sup>th</sup> meeting of the COMESA Business Council(CBC) Board of Directors, held virtually on Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> May 2020.

The 14<sup>th</sup> meeting of the CBC Board of Directors, Presidents and CEOs of national apex private sector Associations and Chambers of Commerce from the COMESA region, was attended by Mr. Marday Venkatasamy from the Mauritius Chambers of Commerce, Dr. Khaled Magboul from Sudan Chambers of Commerce, Mr. Sachin Gudka from Kenya Association of Manufacturers, Dr. Amany Asfour from Egypt Business Women Association, Mr. Robert Bafakulera and Mr. Stephen Ruzibiza from Rwanda Private Sector Federation, Mr. Chris Mugaga from Zimbabwe Chamber of Commerce, Mr. Kevin Themyr from Seychelles Chamber of Commerce and Ms. Sandra Uwera the CBC Chief Executive as Secretary to the Board. The meeting was also attended by the COMESA Secretary General, Ms. Chileshe Kapwepwe as the ex officio member of the Board.

In opening the meeting, the CBC Chairperson, Mr. Venkatasamy commended CBC’s results and performance in 2019, emphasizing the importance of strengthened growth and sustainability, considering the institution’s consolidated income of US\$1,825,492 for the year and a surplus of US\$510,395.00 at year end. He reiterated the commitment of private sector to ensure constant participation in the regional integration agenda and influence policy to the interests of businesses in COMESA. COMESA Secretary General, Ms. Kapwepwe, recognized the need for increased partnership between COMESA and the CBC in the fulfillment of the objectives of the COMESA Treaty to support private sector development and competitiveness, emphasizing the importance of concerted efforts for COVID-19 response mechanisms working with the private sector.

During the Board meeting, the business associations engaged with the COMESA Secretary General on the challenges related to the movement of goods at the borders, due to the containment measures put in place to curb COVID-19. The CBC highlighted the regional Business Position Statement that was presented to COMESA and further informed the development of the COMESA Regional Guidelines for the movement of essential goods and services.

In his remarks, Dr. Magboul of the Sudan Chambers of Commerce, shared various experiences on systems that have been put in place to facilitate the continued trade flows, including relay system for logistics and transporters at the Sudan-Egypt borders. Mr. Bafakulera - Rwanda Private Sector Federation, noted the most recent challenges at the Rusumo border post between Rwanda and Tanzania that has seen the delay of movement of goods due to closure of borders. He noted that bilateral negotiations were ongoing and seemed successful. The CBC Chairperson, Mr. Venkatasamy noted that local production capacity should be enhanced as Africa can be an alternative source market for essential medical supplies. He further noted that Mauritius currently manufactures over 1 million masks a day which could be supplied into the region. The Board recommended that COMESA implement an instant border measures inquiry, reporting and monitoring platform consisting of border coordination platform that supports notification and resolution of impediments in light of the increase in challenges that are being met at the border. The Board further recommended the development of a regional database of suppliers of essential products and medical supplies to address the gaps within the countries.

Affirming the above, the COMESA Secretary General, noted that harmonized approaches towards addressing the measures have been put in place, and further highlighted that the third Extra Ordinary meeting of the COMESA Council of Ministers meeting adopted regional guidelines to address the border corridor impediments. She further informed the meeting of consolidated efforts by COMESA and the AU to facilitate increased production capacity and trade of pharmaceutical products and essential supplies within the region. She also highlighted the importance of increased information-sharing in order to promote business linkages and regional sourcing of essential supplies in COMESA.

The 14<sup>th</sup> CBC Board meeting further considered key issues on the CBC policy agendas including the reports on: Promoting Agro-Industry Supply Chains along the Transport Corridors of Eastern and Southern; the Business Trader Observer (BTO): An Annual Survey of Business Impediments Along Trade and Transport Corridors in COMESA; the Regional Code on Anti-Corruption Compliance for Enterprises; and the Digital Financial Inclusion- Business Case report on a regional digital common payments scheme for MSMEs.

CBC's Chief Executive, Ms. Uwera presented on the measures put in place by the institution to facilitate effective execution of the 2020 workplan in light of the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on the economic landscape of the region. She noted the innovative schemes towards embracing digitization through virtual meetings; online workshops under the Digital Financial Inclusion Project; online trainings under the Local Sourcing for Partnerships Project in DRC and Zambia; and online national dialogues and BIZNET e-Market data mapping exercises in five countries.

Ms. Uwera further drew focus to the enterprise transparency and governance programs, particularly the Regional Code on Anti-Corruption Compliance for Enterprises, developed to inform national anti-corruption compliance policies within the operations of enterprises and Associations; further commending the associations for signing the regional code, and affirming that the CBC will support training programs on the Code's implementation to empower the Associations on compliance.

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ABOUT CBC

*COMESA Business Council is a Business Member Organisation, and the recognised private sector institution of COMESA. We represent the interests of the private sector at a regional level. The services we offer go beyond advocacy to actively promote business participation in regional integration, investment and global trade. This is done by facilitating the growth of strong business synergies, the development of business opportunities, and also through legislative and strategic advocacy. Our services are custom tailored and driven by both industry, and enterprise interests.*

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