

**Statement of the Chair of the Bureau of the 25th
Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts of
Southern Africa and Outgoing Chair of the ICSEO**

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**Honourable Minister,
Director of ECA Sub Regional Office for Southern Africa
Representatives of other UN Organisations and Agencies
Representative of the African Union Southern Africa Regional Office
Representative of COMESA
Representative of SADC
Distinguished Delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen
Member of the Media**

It is a great honour and privilege for me to address the 26th Meeting of Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts (ICSOE) of Southern Africa today on behalf of the Kingdom of Eswatini, the Bureau of the 25th ICSOE and indeed on my own behalf. I wish to warmly congratulate the Government of the Kingdom of Lesotho and its people for hosting this very important meeting and for assuming the Chairmanship of the Bureau of the ICSOE of Southern Africa in the midst of challenging socio-economic times occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic. In the same vein, I would like to express special appreciation and thanks to all member States represented here, the ECA sub regional office for Southern Africa and all other stakeholders, for the confidence you bestowed on the Bureau made up of Eswatini, Lesotho and Malawi at Ezulwini in September 2019 to be of service in the work of ECA in the region during the last twelve months. I am particularly pleased to observe that our pursuit of the singular and common objective of accelerating economic integration in Southern Africa is steadily bearing fruit and the high-level presence of COMESA and SADC at this annual meeting provides the impetus and energy the process so dearly needs. Furthermore, despite the slow progress in the ratification of the African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement in the region, commendable effort is being deployed by regional member States to prepare fully for the commencement of trade under the new regime. Similarly, with support from ECA, member States are accelerating the pace of industrialization in line with both COMESA and SADC aspirations.

**Dear Delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen**

In accomplishing our mandate as your Bureau, we were ably supported by the Secretariat, under whose guidance, we provided policy perspectives and recommendations through an **Outcome Statement** issued and adopted at the 25th ICSOE at Ezulwini. At that Session, we called on more regional member States to undertake voluntary national reviews on SDGs and also to accelerate the implementation of the aspirations of Agenda 2063 and indeed this has occurred and some amongst us have moved to voluntary regional reviews in the assessment of developmental progress premised on leaving no one behind.

Allow me also to recall another important decision of the 25th ICSOE, that of requesting the Secretariat to continue supporting the harmonization of industrialisation policies across member States in line with regional aspirations. It is in this vein that I wish to commend Mr. Sizo Mhlanga, the Director of the ECA sub regional office and his team for providing technical assistance to member States on accelerating domestication of regional industrialization despite the exigencies of the COVID-19 pandemic which reduced physical missions to member States. Furthermore, the Secretariat, in consultation with the Bureau provided the current platform for member States to further dialogue on private sector issues, including micro, small and medium enterprises, as we develop strategies to sustain economic recovery and build back better and faster in the post-pandemic era.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Your Bureau closely followed the work on your Secretariat since Ezulwini and I am pleased to inform you that in addition to carrying out a technical study on **The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and Trade in Services: Opportunities and Strategies for Southern Africa** which was reviewed and discussed by experts a week ago, the Secretariat provided technical assistance to both COMESA and SADC and to their member States towards strengthening regional integration and addressing the peculiar needs of countries. Furthermore, your Secretariat organized a consultative meeting with your Bureau at which the implementation of the recommendations of the 25th ICSOE was reviewed and planning for the 26th ICSOE initiated. Allow me to highlight a few of the other prominent accomplishments during the last twelve months.

The sub regional office successfully developed a comprehensive programme towards supporting the Industrialization Agenda in the COMESA region under which a feasibility study on developing an agro-industrial park between Zambia and Zimbabwe is currently being rolled out. This study is part of a suite of priority projects proposed by the COMESA Secretariat for which ECA is mobilizing resources. Furthermore, support towards accelerating the industrialization agenda through domestication and harmonization of regional policies and frameworks commenced with the inauguration of a United Nations Development Account-funded project to support the attendant processes in Southern Africa early this year. Focusing on domestication and alignment, the three-year project endeavours to create a harmonized policy environment to provide a platform for regional value chains development and attendant industrial development. It will also endeavor to strengthen the relevant institutional structures at national level to anchor the domestication and implementation of the regional industrial policies and strategies and thereby continue the support to regional stakeholders in industrial policy making as directed by the 25th ICSOE. I should also mention that the sub regional office continued to engage member States, COMESA and SADC on priority regional development initiatives including supporting the development of national strategies for the African Continental Free Trade Area in Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Honourable Minister

Before I conclude my remarks, permit me reiterate my special thanks to the Government of the Kingdom of Lesotho, our host during this session and incoming Chair of the ICSOE and to you Honourable Minister for the presence during these deliberations. Your presence, Honourable Minister, underscores the importance that the Government of the Kingdom attaches to the ICSOE as a statutory body that's provides policy guidance to the ECA sub regional office in Southern Africa and the region is grateful for such leadership.

Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to once again congratulate the Bureau of the 26th ICSOE and assure them of our support in steering the ship for the

next twelve months. Let me underscore that building back after the pandemic requires the seamless collaboration of stakeholders at national and regional levels.

I look forward to fruitful deliberations during the next two days, especially to recommendations on how we can build back better, create jobs and boost economic growth through a well capacitated private sector.

I thank you for the kind attention.