



## **COMESA BUSINESS DECLARATION 2024**

OF

## **17<sup>TH</sup> COMESA BUSINESS FORUM**

PRESENTED TO

## **THE 23<sup>RD</sup> SUMMIT OF COMESA HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT**

HELD ON 31<sup>ST</sup> OCTOBER 2024

BUJUMBURA, BURUNDI

**WE THE REGIONAL BUSINESS COMMUNITY**, under the umbrella of the COMESA Business Council (CBC), herein present **COMESA Business Declaration 2024** that was adopted by the **17<sup>th</sup> COMESA Business Forum**, under the theme, “**Accelerating Regional Integration through the Development of Regional Value Chains in Climate Resilient Agriculture, Mining and Tourism**,” held on 28<sup>th</sup> October 2024, in Bujumbura, Burundi, whose resolutions are presented to the 23<sup>rd</sup> Summit of the COMESA Heads of State and Government on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2024.

**RECALL** the decision of the Tenth (10<sup>th</sup>) COMESA Summit of the COMESA Authority of Heads of State held on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2005, in Kigali, Rwanda on the establishment of a COMESA institution that would be the voice of the private sector, with a special mandate for the implementation of Article 18 of the COMESA Treaty, that establishes a consultative forum for the private sector and other interest groups.

**RECALL further** that CBC officially commenced its operations in 2009 and has continued to play an active role within its mandate alongside other COMESA Institutions in supporting COMESA Member States in the attainment of the aims and objectives of COMESA.

**ACKNOWLEDGE** with deep appreciation the efforts and support of COMESA Member States and Policy Organs in the provision of a platform that facilitates dialogue to ensure that the interests of the business community and other interest groups in the Common Market are taken into consideration in the development of COMESA policies and programs towards the attainment of the aims and objective of COMESA.

**EXPRESS** gratitude for support of the partners namely Gates Foundation, Federation of German Industries (BDI), International Trade Centre (ITC), European Union (EU), United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), Afreximbank, Government of the United Kingdom, African Trade and Investment Development Insurance (ATIDI) and Tunisia-Africa Business Council (TABC).

**AND** taking into account the agreed resolutions of the 17<sup>th</sup> COMESA Business Forum.

**WE HEREBY DECLARE AS FOLLOWS:**

### **1.0 Private Sector Development in the Region:**

- (a) Reiterate the call for the COMESA Secretariat and COMESA Business Council Secretariat to collaborate in drafting a regional private sector development strategy for the COMESA region.
- (b) Encourage the private sector to develop business linkages among themselves.
- (c) Encourage COMESA Member States and private sector to work out mechanisms that achieve oversight and accountability of country yields from agriculture, mining and tourism for effective rewarding of primary producers and maximizing much needed state earnings in taxes and foreign exchange.

## 2.0 Trade Facilitation:

**URGE** Member States to continue eliminating or easing restrictions on the movement of businesspersons to reduce the cost of doing business within COMESA by:

- Fully implementing the COMESA Protocol on the Gradual Relaxation and Eventual Elimination of Visas (Visa Protocol).
- Encouraging Member States to sign and ratify the COMESA Free Movement Protocol.
- Entering into bilateral and regional arrangements to facilitate the movement of businesspersons and labour for trade in goods and services.
- Promoting the use of e-visas across the COMESA Region.
- Supporting a single visa for COMESA to enable easier movement of tourists across Member States.

## 3.0 Digital Financial Inclusion in the COMESA Region:

- a) **URGE** Member States to support the roll out of the COMESA Digital Retail Payment Platform being championed by CBC for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in COMESA region that will assist in cost reduction of cross border transactions.
- b) **EXPRESS GRATITUDE** to the COMESA Committee for Central Bank Governors, COMESA Central Banks and COMESA Clearing House for the continued support to the COMESA Digital Financial Inclusion Program for MSMEs.

## 4.0 Climate Resilient Agriculture:

- a) **ENCOURAGE** COMESA Member States, development partners and the private sector to invest in research in areas of technology and agricultural practices that promote climate resilient agriculture.
- b) **URGE** Member States to put in place policies that support access to finance at affordable cost for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) involved in value addition activities in agriculture.
- c) **URGE** COMESA Member States and the private sector to promote local sourcing of products especially for local and regional markets.
- d) **URGE** Member States to reduce Non-Tariff Barriers and implementation of integrated border management systems to facilitate the movement of perishable products.
- e) **ENCOURAGE** Member States to develop infrastructure and establish logistics support networks that improve connectivity of the COMESA region through various modes of transportation such as air, railway and road to reduce transportation costs, enhance supply chain efficiency.
- f) **URGE** COMESA Member States to strengthen quality standards for agriculture products especially on Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) measures and enforcement of environmental standards to promote environmental conservation.
- g) **URGE** COMESA Member States and the private sector to work together towards improving agriculture productivity through smart agriculture practices that address environmental degradation.
- h) **ENCOURAGE** Member States to promote agriculture regional value chains that enhance competitiveness and contribute to regional food security.

## 5.0 Tourism Sector:

- a) **URGE** COMESA Member States to work together in capacity building of MSMEs in the tourism sector to provide quality services that would attract foreign and domestic tourists, thereby, contributing to their national GDP.
- b) **CALL UPON** COMESA Member States to develop frameworks that encourage joint management of shared tourism resources.
- c) **URGE** COMESA Member States to promote regional flight connectivity and railway networks to reduce the cost of travel to encourage domestic and regional tourism.
- d) **URGE** COMESA Member States to develop a unified marketing strategy that promotes the region as a single tourist destination, thereby minimising negative competitive practices in tourism promotion among Member States.
- e) **ENCOURAGE** COMESA Member States to promote cross border investment in tourism in the COMESA region.
- f) **URGE** COMESA Member States to work with the private sector in combating corruption, which has a negative effect on efforts to promote tourism.
- g) **ENCOURAGE** COMESA Member States to harness diversity of the COMESA region in cultural heritage, and gastronomy/cuisine in promoting tourism.

## 6.0 Mining Sector:

- a) **URGE** Members States to develop programs that support access to affordable finance for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) involved in value addition activities in mining sector.
- b) **URGE** Member States to strengthen, implement and enforce environmental and social standards to ensure responsible mining practices and sustainable value chains (e.g. proper waste management and reduced carbon emissions).
- c) **ENCOURAGE** COMESA Member States to develop and implement, effective policies and laws that support value addition of minerals within the region to create jobs for local communities.
- d) **CALL UPON** the private sector to locally process minerals, by providing incentives for companies that wish to establish production facilities in the mining sector within the region.
- e) **URGE** Member States to enhance infrastructure and logistics by investing in transportation networks, power supply, and other logistics systems to facilitate the movement of mining raw materials and finished goods. Such improvements will reduce transportation costs, increase supply chain efficiency, and attract investment in value-added industries.
- f) **ENCOURAGE COMESA** Member States and the private sector to collaborate in developing and implementing capacity-building programs for local mining companies, including SMEs engaged in value-added activities within the mining sector.
- g) **URGE** COMESA Member States to harmonise mining laws and standards in the region.
- h) **ENCOURAGE** corporate social responsibility for mining companies to enhance benefits of local communities.

**DONE AT Bujumbura, Republic of Burundi on the Twenty Eighth (28<sup>th</sup>) day of October 2024**