



**REMARKS BY MS. PAULINA MBALA ELAGO,
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF SACU**

30TH JUNE 2022

7TH SACU SUMMIT

GABORONE, REPUBLIC OF BOTSWANA

Director of Ceremonies, Ms. Tirelo Ramasedi

Your Excellency Dr. Mokgweetsi Eric Keabetswe Masisi, President of the Republic of Botswana and Chairperson of the SACU Summit; and our gracious Host;

Your Excellency Mr. Matamela Cyril Ramaphosa, President of the Republic of South Africa;

The Right Honourable Dr. Moeketsi Majoro, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Lesotho;

The Right Honourable Senator Themba Nhlanganiso Masuku, Deputy Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Eswatini;

Honourable Ipumbu Shiimi, Minister of Finance in the Republic of Namibia representing His Excellency Dr. Hage Geingob; President of the Republic of Namibia;

Honourable Peggy O. Serame, Chairperson of the SACU Council of Ministers and Minister of Finance in Botswana;

Honourable Ministers and Members of the SACU Council of Ministers;

Honourable Members of Parliament;

Your Excellencies Members of the Diplomatic Corps;

Members of the SACU Commission and

Senior Government officials present;

Distinguished Invited Guests

Private Sector representatives

Officials of the SACU Secretariat;

Members of the Media;

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good morning.

Dumelang!

1. Allow me at the onset, to thank and express my sincere appreciation to you, Your Excellencies, for having found time in your extremely busy schedules to meet and engage on matters of importance to our Union.
2. I also wish to take this opportunity to extend a word of gratitude to our host, the Government and people of the Republic of Botswana, for the hospitality and excellent facilities accorded to us since our arrival. I also thank the members of the Council of Ministers for their leadership in the preparations for the 7th Summit of the SACU Heads of State or Government.
3. Your Excellencies will recall that the last SACU Summit was held in this very same venue on the 29th of June 2018, just before the outbreak of COVID-19 in late 2019. The pandemic did not only bring about socio-economic downturns and challenges that have profound implications for our society, but most importantly, it changed the way we operate and conduct our business.

4. Operationally, a notable change resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic was that all our institutional Meetings have been held virtually. Notwithstanding this, we continued to fully implement our Work Programme with minimal disruptions. For the Secretariat, this required substantive investments in Information Communication Technology equipment to enable remote working for our staff as well as engagements with our Member States and other stakeholders.
5. The 7th Summit and the Meeting of the Council that preceded it on 28-29 June 2022, are therefore the first Meetings of the SACU Institutions being held in-person since the outbreak of COVID-19.
6. Thanks to the efforts in the rolling-out of the vaccination programmes across our region, our Member States are steadily opening their economies. This is critical in the effort towards economic recovery especially on critical sectors such as tourism. We remain hopeful that this will help to regain the employment opportunities that were lost at the height of the COVID and put our economies on the growth trajectory, going forward.

Your Excellencies,

7. The 7th Summit will primarily focus on the Report from the Council of Ministers on the progress attained towards the implementation of the SACU Work Programme. The Summit will also receive a presentation on the SACU Strategic Plan that has been approved by the Council of Ministers to guide our operations for the next five years up to 2027.

8. On the Work Programme, the Member States have agreed to refocus the SACU Work Programme on Industrialisation through the development of regional value chains, export, and investment promotion. Additionally, we have prioritised, financing for Industrialisation, Trade Facilitation and Logistics together with the implementation of the **African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)** as key focus areas for the SACU Work Programme. This refocused Work Programme is deliberately structured to ultimately position SACU as the manufacturing and innovation hub for the Continent, and in doing so, to take full advantage of the AfCFTA.

9. Regarding Industrialisation, SACU seeks to deepen regional economic integration through the development of regional value chains. To guide this work, the SACU Member States have adopted a **Vision for industrialisation** which seeks to “*build a diversified, competitive, sustainable and equitable*”

industrial base that supports structural transformation and the economic integration of the SACU region."

10. To attain this Vision, priority sectors, have been selected based on their potential to benefit the region, the opportunities they present and their overall contribution to economic development. These are:
 - (a) Agro-Processing;
 - (b) Textiles and Clothing;
 - (c) Cosmetics and Essential Oils and
 - (d) Pharmaceuticals.

11. We successfully convened Sectoral Roundtables and analysis on these priority sectors, which culminated in a Ministerial Investment Roundtable held on 12-13 April 2022, in Gaborone, Botswana, to showcase and profile the region's development potential as well as investment and export opportunities in these sectors.

Your Excellencies,

12. In the area of Trade Facilitation and Logistics, SACU seeks to create a seamless trade environment for cross-border movements. This is being done through the application of innovative and emerging technologies to streamline processes, enhance collaboration, whilst also detecting and deterring illicit trade in goods within the Common Customs Area. The

Programme also aims address obstacles and hindrances facing businesses that are involved in cross-border trade. Our goal is to develop solutions that are practical, transformational towards enhanced efficiency and that will reduce trade related transaction costs and improve compliance and security of the supply chain amongst others.

13. The Revenue and Customs Authorities in the SACU region are already working closely to implement a dynamic Customs Modernisation Programme, with a view to achieving some of these objectives.

Your Excellencies,

14. The implementation of the AfCFTA is a major priority for SACU as it presents the best opportunity for the region to achieve its integration objectives at both the regional and continental levels. For SACU, the key is to position herself strategically to take full advantage of the export opportunities and ultimately diversify and broaden its industrial capacity to supply the African Continent and beyond.
15. Currently our main priority is the finalisation of the Rules of Origin and Tariff Offers. Having submitted an initial tariff offer, we are now working to conclude the offer that meets the 90% level of ambition.

Your Excellencies;

16. The work we are implementing now, represents notable progress and attainable development prospects for our Union. Their successful implementation will create the necessary momentum to further deepen regional integration and stimulate growth.

17. We are grateful that the 7th Summit will have an opportunity today, to reflect on the work done so far and provide guidance on advancing our regional Agenda. This includes the SACU Strategic Plan, for the five (5)-year period (2022- 2027), whose successful implementation will certainly contribute towards, and bring about, the much-desired structural transformation of the region from a commodity-based economy to that of value addition.

Programme Director,

18. Allow me at this point, to express my appreciation to His Excellency President Masisi and indeed the entire Summit, for their leadership and guidance. In the same vein, we are much indebted to the SACU Council of Ministers for its leadership and Members of the SACU Commission for the support provided to the Secretariat.

Your Excellencies, ladies, and gentlemen,

19. As this is my last Summit, given the end of my term of office in October 2022, I wish to extend my gratitude and appreciation to the Summit for the support they have over the years given to the Secretariat to facilitate implementation of your programmes. I look forward to your continued support as well as to my successor.

20. Finally, I also want to thank my team at the Secretariat for their hard work and dedication in ensuring that the mandate of the Secretariat is delivered to high standards and expectation of our Institutions and people. I further wish to commend all the officials in Botswana and the Secretariat, who worked tirelessly to ensure that all the necessary arrangements are in place for us to convene a successful 7th Summit.

21. Once again, we appreciate your presence here this morning and thank you for your kind attention.