

Governments` Staff to Serve as External Auditors for COMESA

...as justice ministers, AGs adopt legal instruments for auditors



File/ Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe addressing the meeting of Ministers of Justice and Attorneys General in November 2019. On the left is Zambia Justice Minister Hon. Given Lubinda and Judge President of the COMESA Court of Justice Lombe Chibesakunda (Middle).

The COMESA Ministers of Justice and Attorneys General have adopted the COMESA Board of External Auditors (COBEA) instruments which will now govern its operations as external auditors for COMESA. The COBEA legal instruments include the Rules of Procedure, the Standard Operating Procedures, the Quality Assurance Manual and the Financial Auditing manual.

COBEA is made up of Auditors General from COMESA Member States and the new instrument enables them to serve as external auditors for the COMESA Secretariat and its agencies.

The Ministers and AGs adopted the instruments during their 23rd meeting conducted virtually on 18th November 2020.

The legal instruments seek to enhance among other things, internal controls for the management of resources of the Common Market to ensure value for money for the funds that COMESA Member States contribute to the running of the organization.

During the meeting, they also considered four draft subsidiary legal instruments to the COBEA Charter, which provides step by

step guidelines for the conduct of audits to ensure transparency and compliance with international standards and also assure quality control.

The Ministers also approved an amendment to Article 28 of the COMESA Treaty to expand the jurisdiction of the COMESA Court of Justice to include handling of investor/ State disputes.

This decision was informed by the cost involved in engaging in arbitration outside the African Continent. This is in addition to exclusion of African Arbitrators in Arbitration Panels in some commercial centers of the world such as New York and London.

The instruments will now govern the operations of COBEA as external auditors for COMESA

COMESA Scales-Down 2021 Budget to Leverage on ICT



COMESA Secretariat has prepared a scaled-down budget for 2021 to leverage on information technology in carrying out its activities. The decision was informed by the performance of this year's budget, which recorded significant savings under meetings, workshops and conferences, which constitutes a significant percentage of the expenditure.

The adoption of virtual meetings was occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Secretariat now intends to continue harnessing the power of information technology through virtual meetings.

In the proposed budget for 2021, which will be presented to the 41st meeting of the Council of Ministers on Thursday 26 November 2020, the Secretariat proposes a reduction of at least one million dollars from the current budget. The benefit will be passed on to Member States governments in their annual subscriptions to the organization.

Speaking when she addressed delegates attending the 41st Meeting of the COMESA Administrative and Budget Committee, Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe said: "In adjusting the 2021 budget downwards, the Secretariat, its institutions and the

COMESA Court of Justice took cognizance of the economic challenges that our Member States are facing."

She thanked Member States which remitted their annual contributions and arrears to the Secretariat during the year despite the numerous economic challenges they faced. "This demonstrates the confidence bestowed upon us in the delivery of COMESA's mandate," she added.

The Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Matters assists the Inter-Governmental Committee and the Council of Ministers to exercise its oversight role on audit, administrative, budgetary, financial and human resources matters.

During the three days meeting, 16 – 18 November 2020, the Committee received, among others, the progress report on the proposed organizational restructuring. Significant work in this area, which include designing a lean organization structure, review of job descriptions and conducting a skills audit has been undertaken.

The Secretariat is also strengthening its systems, structures and processes through numerous initiatives among them, Business Process Re-engineering (BPR). The BPR is aimed at simplifying and integrating organizational processes in preparation for automation in order to enhance transparency, accountability and efficiency.

COMESA Records Increased Annual Inflation Rate

The annual inflation rate for the month of September 2020 increased to 81.9% up from 23.4% recorded in the same month last year. This means that prices of goods and services in the participating Member States went up..

According to the latest Harmonized Consumer Price Index (HCPI) which measures inflation rate in the COMESA region, using a particular or common currency, an item that cost an average of 100.00 cents in September 2019 increased to 181.60 cents in September 2020.

The HCPI-COMESA comprises 12 divisions of expenditure in food and non-alcoholic beverages, alcoholic beverages and tobacco, clothing and footwear, housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels, furnishing household equipment, communication, recreation and culture, education, restaurants and hotels, miscellaneous goods and services.

Based on the main components of expenditure, communication recorded the highest annual inflation rate of +137.8%

whilst education stood at +51.5%.

Zimbabwe recorded the highest year on year inflation rate followed by Sudan whilst Djibouti recorded the least.

COMESA countries that contribute to the HCPI-COMESA are Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, Sudan, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.



Zambian Civil Societies to Play Greater Role in Peace and Security

Over ten civil society and private sector organizations in Zambia participated in a two-day national consultation workshop on 16-17 November to enhance their role in the COMESA Peace and Security programme as the country prepares to hold general elections in 2021.

COMESA in collaboration with the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) organized the workshop as part of efforts to strengthen collaboration with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and the African Union. This is in addition to establishing a Civil Society National Chapter for ECOSOCC in Zambia.

Under this initiative, the capacity of Zambia's CSOs will be enhanced for better engagement in matters of peace and security in line with the African Union 2020 theme of Silencing the Guns. It will also improve the CSOs engagement with the Zambian Bureau on the implementation of the COMESA Early Warning System (COMWARN). During the same workshop, the participants reviewed the accreditation of local CSOs to the COMESA Programme on Peace and Security (GPS).

The GPS programme was tasked to ensure the involvement of private sector and civil society organisations on matters of peace and security on a consultative basis. Thereafter, the Rules of Procedure were developed for accreditation to the COMESA Peace and Security Programme.

Head of the Unit, Ms. Elizabeth Mutunga told the participants that once CSOs are accredited to the COMESA programme, the Secretariat



Participants at the national consultation workshop training in Chisamba, Lusaka, November, 2020.

provides numerous opportunities to meet and share experiences and to review the impact of the accreditation. Over the years, the Secretariat has collaborated with these organisations to develop and implement some of the current programmes in GPS. Among them is the programme on building the capacity of Member States to address war economies which the accredited CSOs participated in developing.

Accredited organisations also helped during the conceptualisation of the COMESA Early Warning System. The Secretariat has also benefited from their support in activities such as training of COMESA election observers and small-scale cross border traders.

"You will be pleased to know that out of all accredited organisations, Zambia has provided us the greatest support and in addition they have involved us in their programmes and activities," Ms Mutunga said.

So far, similar national consultations have been held in 16 countries, including Burundi, Comoros, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Ethiopia, Eswatini, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Rwanda, Seychelles, Sudan, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Head of Programmes for the ECOSOCC, Mr. Nana Kyeretwire addressed the delegates.

COMESA Court Gets New Judge

Justice Salohy Norotiana Rakotondrajery Randrianarisoa has been elected Judge of the Appellate Division of the COMESA Court of Justice. The election took place during the 23rd meeting of COMESA Ministers of Justice and Attorney's General on 18 November 2020.

Justice Randrianarisoa, a Senior Judge and Director General of Judicial Affairs, Research and Reforms at the Ministry of Justice of Madagascar replaces the late Justice Abdalla El Bashir from Sudan, who passed away in February this year.

The election was conducted under an online secret ballot which saw Justice Randrianarisoa lead other contenders from Djibouti and Sudan.



At the same meeting, the Ministers received nominations for Commissioners of the COMESA Competition Commission. These are: Mahmoud M. Momtaz from Egypt, Thembelihle Precious Dube (Eswatini), Beatrice Uwumukiza (Rwanda),

Francis Lebon (Seychelles), Islam Tagelsir Ahmed Alhasan (Sudan), Brian M. Lingela (Zambia) and Ellen Rugaranganda (Zimbabwe).

Tunisia Host eBusiness Forum



The Tunisian Export Promotion Center - CEPEX in partnership with GIZ, in the context of the German Development cooperation with Tunisia, organized an online business-matching event dubbed "Tunisia Africa E-Business Meetings on 18th-19th and 20th of November 2020.

The event brought together more than 600 Tunisian exporting companies and partners from Sub-Saharan African countries to a B2B forum based on virtual and direct business meetings in several sectors of activities.

The main objective of the event was to promote South-South partnership and boost economic exchanges between African countries. This is expected to be achieved through consolidating economic relations through Networking, identifying new opportunities for cooperation with African economic operators, mobilizing all actors towards better African integration and boosting intra-African trade exchanges.

Key sectors represented at the forum were: Food and Agribusiness, Construction, Building, public

works & heavy equipment, mechanical, electrical and electronic, healthcare, training, education and higher learning, textile, apparel & leather and footwear, chemicals and chemical products, wood and wood products, audit, consulting, accounting, services for companies and ICT.

Keynote speakers included the Head of the Tunisian Government, Excellency Mr. Hichem Mechichi, Minister of Trade and Export Development, Hon. Mr. Mohamed Boussaid, Commissioner, Trade and Industry at the Africa Union Commission, Ambassador Albert Muchanga, the Director of the African Institute for Economic Development Planning Mrs. Karima Bounemra and COMESA Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe.

In her statement, Ms Kapwepwe hailed Tunisia and other Member States on the innovative ways that governments and businesses were adapting to find solutions that forestall the negative impacts of the COVID 19 pandemic and maintain their growth trajectories.

International Chamber of Commerce Signs Business Pact with COMESA

The COMESA Business Council (CBC) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) to strengthen business partnerships for its members in regional and international markets. The event took place during the ICC/World Chambers Federation Action Network Meeting on 9 November 2020.

Over 70 business leaders representing business associations from Africa and the rest of the world including CBC Board Directors and ICC Members attended the event.

CBC Chairperson Mr. Marday Venkatasamy described the new partnership as timely for both organisations due to the impact of COVID-19 which has necessitated a change in trade dynamics and brought about the need for greater reliance on business and private sector led-growth.

"Through this MoU, CBC becomes the partner through which we can strengthen the participation of African businesses in multilateral negotiations related to trade, investment and sustainable development," Mr. Venkatasamy added.

ICC Secretary General Mr. John Denton said the two organisations have several similarities in their objectives and it was pleasing that they were joining forces for the common endeavor to improve the lives and livelihoods of all those who live in Africa.

"The fact that we are now able to come together to work for the advancement of the interests of business in Africa is a fantastic opportunity. We will not let you down," Mr. Denton said.

With the signing of the MoU, the parties will develop an implementation plan on facilitating business partnerships and increasing inter-regional trade, advocacy and strengthening

African business participation in multilateral policy, business facilitation measures to advance sustainable development Goals. Furthermore, the MoU will address key emerging issues for business such as digital trade facilitation, SMEs sustainability and other strategies to facilitate movement of goods and services particularly within the COVID-19 pandemic period.

The ICC represents more than 45 million companies in over 100 countries.

"Through this MoU, CBC becomes the partner through which we can strengthen the participation of African businesses in multilateral negotiations related to trade, investment and sustainable development,

-Mr. Marday Venkatasamy



50 Million African Women Speak platform Launched in Egypt



Eng. Tarek Shash speaks during the launch event in Cairo

Egypt became the seventh COMESA Member State to launch the 50 Million African Women Speak (50MAWSP) platform at a colourful event held in Cairo on Wednesday 18 November 2020.

The national launch of the platform was presided over by the Deputy Executive Director of the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise Development Agency (MSMEDA), Eng. Tarek Shash, who represented Her Excellency Nevine Gamea, the country's Minister of Trade and Industry and MSMEDA Executive Director.

At the well-attended event, which was a hybrid of conventional and virtual ceremonies, Eng. Shash gave a ringing endorsement of the platform, describing the 50MAWSP initiative as "key" because the Egypt's national strategy for SMEs is focused on digitalisation.

"Women are prioritised in terms of entrepreneurship hence having this platform in place will help us to achieve the plan to enable them to network," Eng. Shash said.

"This is only the beginning. We need to do more after the launch. The success of the platform cannot be achieved singlehandedly," he added as he emphasized the need for continued collaboration. The MSMEDA Deputy Executive Director also thanked COMESA and the African Development Bank for their support in making the platform a reality in Egypt.

COMESA's high-profile participation at the event was led by Assistant Secretary General Dr. Kipyego Cheluget who observed that women's economic participation is key to poverty eradication and inclusive economic growth.

Dr. Cheluget however decried the gender-specific barriers such as limited access to information and networking opportunities which hamper the ability of women to do business. He remarked that the 50MAWSP platform would help to change this. "The 50 Million African Women Speak platform is an initiative that uses technology to empower women by providing them with the information they need to start or grow their businesses.

.....
"This is only the beginning. We need to do more after the launch. The success of the platform cannot be achieved singlehandedly,"

-Eng. Tarek Shash

.....
"This digital platform is much more than a marketplace for Egyptian women to showcase their products or connect with buyers. It is a hub providing information on where they can access financial services, business management training, financial literacy skilling and useful tips on how to engage in import or export business," he said.

He commended the Government of Egypt for its support in implementing the initiative and urged the Member State to devote the required resources to ensure its sustainability. He thanked the funding partner, African Development Bank (AfDB) for the financial support which has made the 50 Million African Women Speak Project possible across the COMESA, EAC and ECOWAS regional blocs.

The AfDB Country Manager for Egypt, Ms Malinne Blomberg, on her part noted that the 50 Million African Women Speak Project reflects the agenda of the Bank to mainstream gender in all its initiatives and added that the "50MAWSP platform may have an even bigger importance than may have been originally envisaged in the midst of the COVID pandemic."

The 50 Million African Women Speak platform aims to facilitate a dynamic and engaging exchange of ideas among women entrepreneurs, using in-built social media functionality to connect them with one another in ways that will foster peer-to-peer learning, mentoring and the sharing of information and knowledge within communities, and access to financial services and market opportunities between urban and rural areas, and across borders and between countries.

Launches in eight other COMESA Member States are planned.



L-R: Cavendish University Zambia, Senior Admissions Officer, Ms. Charity Chama, Finance Director Mr. Daniel Nkhole, Students' Union Minister of Finance Brian Chiinza and COMESA Corporate Communications Assistant Mr. Daniel Banda at the handing over of COMESA Publications to the University, 6 November 2020. COMESA Secretariat publishes a wide range of publications every year aimed at sharing information and knowledge with stakeholders and the public to raise their awareness on regional integration and its benefits.

The COMESA Diary

23-24
Nov 2020

41st Meeting of the COMESA Intergovernmental Committee
Organised by: Secretariat **Venue:** Virtual

26
Nov 2020

Signing Agreements with the European Union on COMESA Capacity Building Programme
Organised by: COMESA Secretariat **Venue:** Secretariat

26-27
Nov 2020

41st Meeting of the COMESA Council of Ministers
Organised by: Secretariat **Venue:** Virtual

 COMESA SECRETARIAT
COMESA Center
Ben Bella Road
P.O. Box 30051. Lusaka, Zambia

 +260 211 229 725

 www.comesa.int

 info@comesa.int

 facebook.com/COMESA/

 [@twitter.com/comesa_lusaka](https://twitter.com/comesa_lusaka)