



STATEMENT BY THE RIGHT HONOURABLE
THE PRIME MINISTER DURING THE AFCFTA
EXTRAORDINARY SUMMIT OF THE AFRICAN
HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT

5 DECEMBER 2020



His Excellency Chair of the AU

Heads of State and Government

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen

It is with great pleasure and honour that I am addressing this august gathering today and to be part of this memorable event that marks the realisation of our long term goal through the attainment of the greatest milestones thus far to fulfil the aspirations of our people. That is, the economic integration and our unity as Africans.

Excellencies,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen

This Summit comes at a challenging time when the rest of the world is dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic and its consequences which have resulted into mounting regional setbacks by exerting tensions on our scarce resources. We should nonetheless take this as a blessing in disguise because it has taught us to be more vigilant, creative and proactive in finding solutions to these myriad problems that we are currently facing.

For small economies like Lesotho, the pandemic, together with the climate change crisis which impacts directly on food security, trade and livelihoods, the effects have become more severe than we ever encountered. For instance, we are experiencing high youth unemployment rates and additional loss of jobs as the scourge of the pandemic has exacerbated this state of affairs. It is for this reason that the Government of Lesotho is working hard to put in place and or review policies, legislation and strategies that can lift her out of the situation. The

National Trade Policy Framework; National Export Strategy; Business and Registration Law; and upgrading of the Lesotho Trade Information Portal are just few examples that I can highlight to illustrate the initiatives that we have embarked on to mitigate these problems.

Notwithstanding these challenges, we should embrace the main objectives of the AfCFTA of:

- i. Enhancing competitiveness;
- ii. Overcoming dependence on exportation of primary products;
- iii. Resolving challenges of multiple and overlapping memberships within the continent;
- iv. Diversifying our economies; and ultimately
- v. Creating a freer market for goods and services.

There is no doubt that creating a single market will facilitate the movement of natural persons and promote industrial development resulting in sustainable and inclusive socio-economic growth. If at all we can manage to achieve these objectives, we will certainly be able to attain the milestones of the Agenda 2063. The launching of the commencement of trading under the AfCFTA means that **“The Africa We Want”** is becoming a reality.

Excellencies,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Although we have travelled this far on our journey and the end is within our reach, we acknowledge that we are yet to complete it. In order to facilitate full implementation of the AfCFTA, we therefore encourage all Member States that have not yet ratified this agreement to do so and submit their tariff and services schedules so that we can move in one accord. It is through these processes that we will be able to fully benefit from the opportunities of this developmental

instrument that African nations have set themselves to achieve. It is also prudent on our part to ensure that all trade negotiations under the Phase I of the AfCFTA are concluded at the earliest possible time that we will all agree on today.

Lesotho is looking forward to working with all African Union Member States to find mutually beneficial solutions on the outstanding issues in these negotiations. With just enough effort and perseverance such solutions will be achieved.

At this juncture, I would like to acknowledge with gratitude the leadership of the African Union Commission in guiding the process thus far; and to welcome the enthusiastic demeanor and dedication of the trade experts for the good work that has made AfCFTA a reality. We should encourage them even more to engage vigorously in the Phase II negotiations of the AfCFTA.

Lesotho stands ready to implement the AfCFTA agreement and to continue to participate in the on-going Phase II Negotiations for the fulfillment of the AfCFTA overall objective of Boosting intra-African Trade.

The era we are in now calls for intensified strategic approaches towards trade and investment. Hence, I strongly believe that the Phase II AfCFTA Negotiations on Investment will take into consideration the lessons learnt from the Covid-19 pandemic to enable us to be a united and prosperous continent. Trade and investment together with requisite negotiating areas should have a transformative effect on our economies.

In conclusion, the AfCFTA is likely to be the largest trade agreement in the World with many countries; varying developmental levels and standards of living. This should however result in tangible outcomes that will increase industrialisation, investments and employment for large youth population in African States. It is imperative that all AU Member States ratify and fully implement this Agreement in order to achieve the desired results.

It is for these reasons that I implore all of us to bear these facts at the back of our minds as we owe it to our nations to ensure that this Agreement enables our countries to industrialise and significantly reduce the high unemployment rates, particularly among our youth.

I Thank you for your attention.

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