

United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA)

and

SADC Business Council

Private Sector Sensitization Forum

On the Theme

***Post-COVID Recovery Strategies and Regional Integration
in Southern Africa: Challenges and Opportunities for the Private Sector***

Draft Official Opening Statement

By

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Dear Mr Peter Varndell, Chief Executive Officer of the Southern African Development Community (SADC Business Council);

Representatives from Regional Economic Communities, COMESA and SADC;

Dear fellow panelists and moderators

Fellow UN and UNECA colleagues;

Distinguished Experts and Participants

Ladies and Gentlemen;

All Protocols Observed;

Good morning. On behalf of the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and indeed on my own behalf I would like to welcome you all to this Private Sector Sensitization Forum which is a joint-event between the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa Sub Regional office for Southern Africa and the SADC Business Council. We hope we will continue to collaborate with the SADC Business Council in a number of our activities including the unfolding African Continental Free Trade Area (the AfCFTA). I also welcome our all weather experts who will share insights in th

Ladies and gentlemen, today's event on: ***Post-COVID Recovery Strategies and Regional Integration in Southern Africa: Challenges and Opportunities for the Private Sector*** will entail the critical review of the policy implications for policymakers, the attendant potential areas of development that the private sector can engage in as part of building back better and faster in the post COVID era and of course, the challenges and opportunities faced by the private sector in regional integration processes.

The current crisis admittedly presents an opportunity for member States and RECs to rethink their development strategies and take advantage of science, technology and innovation, digitalization, sustainable and inclusive industrialization, climate-friendly strategies and regional integration as pathways for building resilience against future shocks. The private sector should be the natural partners to enable this – policy-makers makers should therefore ensure that there is greater participation by the private sector in decision-making processes, planning etc. in the region. Creating space for public-private dialogue and exchanges is therefore important.

COVID-19 effects have not spared us in Southern Africa. The dependence of our economies in the region on South Africa, as both an import market and an export destination and on a narrow range of economic sectors has exposed once more the region to its vulnerabilities arising from a lack of diversification – be it in trade, investment or products being marketed. More than ever, countries in the region need to create conditions for the private sector to be more effective drivers of industrialization, economic diversification, trade and investment in the region. This would of course lead to reinvigorated economic growth and decent jobs.

I am positive that the discussions today will bring to the fore the nature of constraints faced by the private sector in diversification efforts, upgrading in higher value-added segments of their product and services value-chains and trading and investing in the region. I hope the attendant opportunities and practical solutions will be proffered to address these constraints.

The current crisis has also exposed frailties such as governance, management and productivity and competitiveness of both public and private enterprises. Building competitiveness, enhancing productivity and improving on governance are critical elements towards building resilience against future shocks.

As some of you may be aware, the ECA Sub Regional office for Southern Africa two weeks ago held its 26th Intergovernmental Committee of Senior officials and Experts (ICSOE) on the theme of “*Policies and strategies towards effective private sector led growth and job creation in Southern Africa.*” This was the beginning of a dialogue between policy makers and representatives of the private sector, academia and civil society towards addressing the constraints of the private sector in Southern Africa, more so, in the COVID 19 context. We are continuing today with the same thread to drill down on this important sector.

Before concluding, allow me, ladies and gentlemen, to reiterate our commitment to supporting member States to harness the AfCFTA for higher levels of socio-economic development and greater levels of prosperity for its citizens..

The AfCFTA is being portrayed as a game changer for the continent and the private sector is a critical actor for realising the gains of the AfCFTA. It is important therefore that the private sector understands what the AfCFTA is about, how to take

advantage of the same and be in a position to inform on the challenges and opportunities encountered during its implementation.

On this note, I wish you all, a successful meeting. I hope that you will be able to stay for the whole day to enrich the dialogue with your insights and experiences.