

**21ST COMESA SUMMIT OF HEADS OF STATE
AND GOVERNMENT,
23rd November 2021**

**on the Theme:
"Building Resilience Through Strategic Digital Economic Integration"**

**STATEMENT
BY HON PRAVIND KUMAR JUGNAUTH
PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF MAURITIUS**

**H.E Mr Andry Rajoelina, President of the Republic of Madagascar and
Chairperson of the COMESA Authority,**

**H.E Mr Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt
and Incoming Chairperson of the COMESA Authority,**

Your Excellencies, Heads of State and Government,

The Secretary General of the COMESA,

Distinguished Delegates,

Allow me, first of all, to congratulate His Excellency, Mr Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt as the incoming Chairperson of the COMESA Authority. Let me also thank His Excellency Mr Andry Rajoelina, President of the Republic of Madagascar for his sterling stewardship of our Organisation during these difficult times.

The choice of the theme for this year's Summit reflects our determination to find new and creative ways to adapt to the new normal, which the COVID-19 pandemic has imposed upon us all. Building a stronger integrated regional digital economy is in our view, the most fitted response to the challenge we are facing. It is one that has proven itself in developed economies, and is capable of providing a business continuity that will

revitalise our own economies and pave the way for sustainable growth and development.

Excellencies,

The pandemic is a global health tragedy which continues to have devastating and far-reaching effects on our health-care systems, economies, and social life, and has caused hundreds of thousands of deaths. From September 2020 to September 2021, the COMESA region has seen an increase of 747% in the number of fatalities.

Our economies have been severely impacted due to the inevitable lockdowns. Momentum gained through the establishment of the COMESA-EAC-SADC Tripartite Free Trade Area has lost its steam. Yet, with a combined estimated population of 800 million and US\$ 1.4 trillion Gross Domestic Product, the Tripartite Free Trade Area has the potential to stimulate growth as well as boost trade and investment to ensure that our people are not left behind.

Excellencies,

Even before the COVID-19 Pandemic, internet was transforming the world economy, and now connectivity has become a prerequisite for national competitiveness in a digitalized world economy. Digitization of trade facilitation instruments for cross border trading of goods and services can greatly enhance the speed and volume of trade. The implementation of the COMESA's Digital Free Trade Area platform, Electronic Certificate of Origin, Customs Automation, Non-Tariff Barriers Monitoring System, Simplified Trade Regime and Yellow Card Scheme will go a long way in supporting cross border trade in the region. I commend the Secretariat for developing the digital online platform for exchanging and sharing information on availability of essential products within the COMESA region.

However, for these platforms to work, we need to ensure internet accessibility at affordable cost to every corner of our countries. We need also to address issues of cyber security and disinformation which unfortunately come together with ICT development. Equally important will

be the need for the youth of our region to develop and enhance their skills so that they can participate in the global economy.

Excellencies,

Mauritius welcomes the setting up of the “*50 Million African Women Speak Digital Platform*” aimed at empowering women in Africa.

I also welcome COMESA’s New 2021-2025 Medium Term Strategic Plan which outlines the key strategic objectives in achieving our regional integration goals. I note with satisfaction the inclusion of the proposals made by Mauritius highlighting the priorities of Island States in areas of maritime, air and digital connectivity, climate change, and ocean economy.

Excellencies,

Resilience building against pandemics will necessitate a readjustment of our industrialisation strategy. We should endeavour to become self sufficient in products of vital importance such as vaccines. I congratulate Egypt for the production of the Sinovac vaccine. My Government had issued an expression of interest for the development of a pharmaceutical industry and the setting up of a biotechnology plant in Mauritius and we invited interested international companies with relevant experience and know-how to express their interest in such a venture.

Excellencies,

Mauritius strongly believes that the deepening of intra COMESA trade and development can be a key enabler to drive our economic growth, create jobs, and bring prosperity to our people.

Thank you for your kind attention.