

Welcoming remarks by H.E. Osman Saleh
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the
State of Eritrea



At the 23rd Meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts (ICSOE)-ECS Office for Eastern Africa 5th-7th November 2019 -Asmara, Eritrea

Honorable Dr. Vera Songwe, Executive Secretary of UNECA,

Honorable Ministers and Senior Government Officials,
Distinguished Delegates and Invited Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me a great pleasure to welcome you all to the beautiful city of Asmara which is often referred to as “**Africa’s jewel of Modernity!**”.

Indeed, it is with immense gratitude and honor that the people and government of Eritrea are hosting the 23rd Meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts of the Economic Commission for Africa – Sub-Regional for Eastern Africa. In this regard, I would like to thank the Sub-Regional Office for Eastern Africa for providing us with the opportunity to host this timely and important event. I would like also to recognize the outgoing Chair of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts, the Republic of Rwanda, for steering ably the works of the 22nd Meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts.

Distinguished Delegates,

As the theme of this gathering insinuates, Africa in general and the Eastern Africa region in particular, have remarkable potential and capabilities to leverage and expedite regional integration. Our sub-region - the Horn of Africa - after decades of externally induced inter-and-intra-state conflicts, has begun to breathe the air of hope and togetherness. Peace and stability, critical prerequisite of regional integration, are new opportunities that we can leverage for regional integration.

Evidently, central to the recent hopeful environment prevailing in our region is the landmark peace deal signed between H.E. President Isaias Afwerki and H.E. P.M. Abiy Ahmed last year here in Asmara.

The peace-dividend of this historic event can simply be attested by the consequential engagements undertaken among the leaders and peoples of the sub-region in the past 15 months. The leaders of Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Djibouti, South Sudan, the Sudan and Kenya have reaffirmed their strong commitments to work together and realize the aspirations of their brotherly peoples. Indeed, this is what we need to capitalize on as we envisage materializing regional integration.

Distinguished Delegates,

The combined human and natural resources of our region are significantly enormous to transform the lives of each individual person.

Apparently, these resources are not an end by themselves. The lofty ideals of regional economic integration might seem appealing on blue prints. However, it is judicious to design pragmatic policies and measurable projects. Without transforming our existing infrastructural capacities, both human and physical, lofty objectives of enhancing regional trade or economic integration, will remain wishful and incomprehensible.

Transformation and improvements of our connectivity through roads, railways, sea-ports, airports, pipelines...etc. will inevitably entail substantial financial and human capital, as well as technological and energy capacities. To put in place all these inputs, we should primarily value and mobilize our domestic resources. Africa has already drawn enough lessons from falling victim to global financial institutions and corporate conglomerates.

Distinguished Delegates,

For its part, Eritrea has been engaged in implementing transformative developmental policies and projects; driven by its internal capacities. To ensure the delivery of basic social services, such as health, water,

education, transportation and livelihood, significant policy measures have been executed. At this momentous peace-time, the 'can do' spirit of the Eritrean people and the government of Eritrea has prompted them to embark on rapid development to regain lost opportunities and attain a viable socio-economic transformation in the coming few years.

Distinguished Delegates,

In the following three days, as we reflect on the "new opportunities for regional integration," we have to be mindful of the interdependency of every single sector and we need to create synergies to ensure coherence and sustainability. All the thematic areas identified in our Programme of Work are topical and I hope our deliberations would galvanize to unlock the shared opportunities and potentials in our region.

Eritrea's view of regional integration is guided by simple and doable vision; that is **building strong regional blocks**. We should not be trapped in overlapping and ambitious regional gatherings and forums. Gauging our real capabilities entails prudence.

Distinguished Delegates,

Finally, while I place my trust in the success of the 23rd Meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts, I hereby officially open the Meeting. I wish you all very successful deliberations and a pleasant stay!

I Thank You!