

**Statement by Mr. Osman Saleh Minister
of Foreign Affairs at the 24th ICSOE Meeting**



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Honorable Ministers

Secretary Generals, Permanent Secretaries and Senior Government Officials

Secretary Generals from RECs

The Executive Secretary for the Economic Commission for Africa;

Senior Officials from the Economic Commission for Africa;

Private Sector organizations and Non-Governmental Organizations
representatives;

Youth, women representatives

Experts at all levels

Members of the Press

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the Government of the State of Eritrea, I welcome all participants to the 24th Inter-governmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts (ICSOE) special session and thank you all for finding time to participate. I thank UNECA for convening this virtual platform enabling us to deliberate on policy issues that address the socio-economic challenges and shaping the landscape for the development of our region.

From the outset, let me commend the Sub-regional Office – East Africa (SRO – EA) and the 23th Session Bureau for their efforts to shape policy in various capacities since their appointment last year in Asmara. You will recall that last year Eritrea was appointed by yourselves as Chair of the Bureau, with Seychelles and Ethiopia as first and second vice chairs, and Tanzania as rapporteur. The Bureau since then has worked very closely with the UNECA towards the implementation of some of the recommendations made. The present special session provides an opportunity to discuss some of the achievements made despite the very difficult conditions created by the COVID 19 pandemic.

Distinguished participants, Ladies and Gentlemen

The pandemic has become the biggest challenge of recent times confronting the ideals of humanity that bestows collective and shared responsibility beyond existing boundaries and political stance. In our region, the pandemic has been coupled with locust invasion and flooding with significant effect to development and people's livelihood. Nevertheless, countries in our region were among the very first countries to take aggressive measures against COVID-19 through mandatory quarantine and have tackled the pandemic and its effects by mobilizing national capacities and stimulus packages wherever possible, in the interest of social protection and macro-economic recovery.

The overwhelming focus as priority remains people's health with commitments to saving lives. As a result, our sub-region has the lowest COVID-19 cases in the continent. For the particular case of my country, Eritrea, it is a great satisfaction to say that it has been contained and we have zero recorded death to-date.

The challenges are however of phenomenal proportion and consolidating the pragmatic national approaches remain critical. Nonetheless, it is imperative to harness the regional integration potential to eradicate COVID-19, stimulate economic recovery and promote the development of our economies. In this vein, harmonizing efforts, creating complementariness, promoting cooperation as well as sharing experience is a necessity. I note with high praise that this session will capitalize on these aspects decisively.

Distinguished participants, Ladies and Gentlemen

In the above context, reflecting the ongoing experience and impact of the pandemic in people's life and health security is central to underline the importance of consolidating our future emergency preparedness as well as at building requisite institutional and organizational capabilities. It is my hope that the discussion on the COVID 19 experiences reflects the present challenges and the attendant drive to create better preparedness for the future. Outlining a preliminary conceptual framework for action can also serve as a basis for a forward looking pragmatic vision, praxis and organization.

Allow me to share Eritrea's initiative in this regard for your information. On the occasion of the 29th independence anniversary, on May 24, 2020, the president of the State of Eritrea HE Isaias Afwerki made public Eritrea's road map for an emerging viable health security and preparedness by building capacity in functional areas as well as in requisite institutional, organizational and research capabilities. This will be detailed further in due time to build Eritrea's emergency preparedness.

Distinguished participants, Ladies and Gentlemen

Following the 23rd ICISOE, the Bureau has worked closely with the EAC to implement some of the recommendations made last year. It is ironic that the present session has maintained the essence and continuity of the previous sessions while highlighting the impact of the global pandemic and ways of overturning the challenges into opportunities vital for post COVID 19 development

prospects. In this regard, the session's focus on building back faster and better out of the crisis should dominate the proceeding.

No single country has the solution to recovering fast and recall that we committed to harnessing the potential for regional integration. We need to exchange ideas, involve all stakeholders, and learn from everyone's experience and chart the way forwards. In this regard, the thematic areas included in the programme can serve as entry points. In general, it is a necessity that the essence of the common challenges is objectively discussed to outline a common basis leading to a conceptual framework on the post-COVID development with implication to regional cooperation, the specific context, needs and human betterment ideals of each member state being considered objectively.

In conclusion, distinguished delegates and participants, on behalf of my Government, I hereby take this opportunity to wish you fruitful deliberations aimed at building back better from the scourge of COVID-19 and other prevailing challenges. I hereby declare the virtual session officially open and in the prevailing situation wish you all to "stay safe, stable and strong!"

I thank you!