



REMARKS BY THE MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS AND  
TRANSPORT HONOURABLE TŠOEU MOKERETLA ON BEHALF OF  
THE MINISTER OF FINANCE AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE  
WORLD CUSTOMS ORGANIZATION (WCO) EAST AND SOUTHERN  
AFRICA (ESA) REGIONAL GOVERNING COUNCIL MEETING.

**DATE:** THURSDAY, 26TH MAY, 2016.

**VENUE:** AVANI-LESOTHO

## **SALUTATIONS**

DISTINGUISHED GUESTS, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN GOOD MORNING.  
THE MASTER OF CEREMONIES, ALLOW ME TO PAY MY RESPECTS TO:

HIS MAJESTY KING LETSIE III;

RIGHT HONOURABLE THE PRIME MINISTER;

HONOURABLE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER;

HONOURABLE MINISTERS AND IN PARTICULAR, MY COLLEAGUE THE  
MINISTER OF TRADE, HON. JOSHUA SETIPA WHO IS HERE WITH US THIS  
MORNING;

YOUR EXCELLENCIES HEADS OF DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS AND HEADS OF  
INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS IN LESOTHO;

THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE WORLD CUSTOMS ORGANISATION  
(WCO) MR. KUNIO MIKURIYA;

PRINCIPAL SECRETARIES AND OTHER SENIOR GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS;

THE VICE CHAIRPERSON OF THE WCO ESA REGION;

THE CHAIRPERSON AND BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE LRA;

THE ACTING COMMISSIONER GENERAL OF THE LRA;

DIRECTORS GENERAL AND COMMISSIONERS GENERAL FROM MEMBER  
COUNTRIES;

THE DIRECTOR OF THE REGIONAL OFFICE FOR CAPACITY BUILDING  
(ROCB);

HEADS OF CUSTOMS;

MEMBERS OF THE MEDIA;

DISTINGUISHED INVITED GUESTS;

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN;

It is a great pleasure to welcome you all to our beautiful Kingdom, the only one in the sky — especially as this is my first time meeting all the Customs fraternity from across the East and Southern Africa in one room.

I am very thankful for this opportunity to interact with you.

I do hope you have already experienced the outstanding reception and hospitality that Basotho are renowned for! Once again, we warmly welcome you.

We are gathered here at this august event bound together by a common cord, that is, the economic growth and development of our region and individual countries that can be achieved among others through the seamless flow and facilitation of trade in goods and services across national frontiers.

This we do, not only as obliged by national commitments but also pursuant to international obligations towards reform and modernization that if effectively implemented makes for the eventual elevation to a better standard of living of our people.

Today marks a major highlight and is a bold statement by the WCO, East and Southern Africa Region to its nations that we are indeed committed to levelling the playing field

for the good of business, hence global opportunities for our countries.

Trade facilitation reforms can help to cut trade costs, thereby improving trading conditions and supporting economic growth. I am happy to share with you that Lesotho has been undertaking important initiatives on this front, in particular the implementation of automated Customs system. Lesotho has also taken several steps towards a long-term 'single-window' program.

Ratifying the World Trade Organisation (WTO) agreement is one of our major steps forward. Full implementation could help to boost exports and help Lesotho's integration into global value chains, helping the country reap more gains from trade. I challenge you as a Region to do likewise — and so this is a critical moment. The WCO ESA Region must keep making its voice heard to solicit our international partner support for economic growth and development globally.

## **WTO-WCO collaboration**

Distinguished guests;

Trade and Customs have quite different mandates, but we have many shared aims.

Both WTO and WCO have development at the heart of their work. But the links are more specific than that.

At the WTO, we seek to ensure that the global trading system operates in a fair and efficient way, which supports growth and development and allows people to access the goods and services that they need. Prominent features of this collaboration include

- My colleagues, Ministers of Trade in Bali endorsed the Trade Facilitation Agreement, and WCO has developed the Mercator Program for the TFA implementation
- Active participation of the WCO at WTO negotiations on Trade Facilitation
- WCO's vast technical expertise, including key instruments in the customs domain, utilized under WTO technical assistance initiatives

Common activities are likely to increase further with both organizations embarking on an extensive needs and cost assessment program, together with other international partners in the technical assistance field in view of the Trade Facilitation Agreement implementation.

The WCO and the WTO are engaged in issues of global governance which could scarcely be more important.

Together with them, we are trying to give people the tools they need to live better, more prosperous lives. That work must start with securing stable global trade

And so I think it is natural that the two organizations and of course their membership including ESA maintain strong ties of collaboration. We are building an important partnership here — and deepening an important channel of dialogue!

In view of the ensuing global partnership, I urge Customs Directors General and Commissioners here present to commit to improving coherence and joining forces to tackle the major global challenges.

Turning to the Council's Agenda, I do note that you have a number of important issues to deal with, covering the global issues in customs development as well as trade facilitation initiatives. I will be looking forward to receiving reports of the progress achieved and urge all representatives of the member states to support implementation of these initiatives that seek to strengthen our integration and cooperation in order to position the ESA Region as a catalyst for equitable and sustainable economic growth in this part of Africa and beyond.

In an era of free trade and trade liberalization, there is need for global and international cooperation and sharing of intelligence information among the countries for protection of our societies in order to control the illicit movement of goods across border. Cross-border strategies need to be employed and border agencies empowered in order to read between the lines and be fully equipped to handle the latest technology tools efficiently and effectively in order to keep pace with the techniques used by the tax evaders who always try to exploit the gaps in the law – Border interconnectivity is our best deal and therefore Digital Customs must be upheld.

Moving further, allow me to give you a brief background to an issue which I know to be center stage for your Council's session Agenda.

In December 2013, WTO members concluded negotiations on a Trade Facilitation Agreement at the Bali Ministerial Conference, as part of a wider "Bali Package". The Trade Facilitation Agreement contains provisions for expediting the movement, release and clearance of goods, including goods in transit. It also sets out measures for effective cooperation between customs and other appropriate authorities on trade facilitation and customs compliance



issues. It further contains provisions for technical assistance and capacity building in this area.

Your dialogue over the two days will therefore be an important moment in advancing this work as you deliberate on a long-term Regional Strategy, adopt new instruments, and improve governance. In my opinion, learning from other countries is one of the best ways to assess and improve our own systems. If we are to learn from one another, we need to measure, evaluate and compare the quality of our tax administration systems. It will be worthwhile to have a discussion on inclusive approach of Customs towards business communities, particularly after potential entrepreneurs have acquired new skills as a result of changes in the economic structure. I urge you to develop and advocate better for a Customs policy of encouraging business compliance with the incentive of improved facilitative measures.

I would encourage you to be creative and to contribute to an open and lively discussion. My sincere hope is that your meeting here in Maseru will provide new ideas and valuable input for your work as Heads of Customs. The current economic downturn may provide a window for opportunity – an opportunity to rethink our Customs and Trade priorities.

As you prepare for this work, here's my note of encouragement; hold on to the following ideals

the desire to collaborate; to give resolutions to problems, not in conflict, but in discussion; to take down walls — not build new ones; to work together for the benefit of all.

So I invite you all to engage over the next few days with an open mind and with your eyes on the future.

To our development partners

I wish to thank all representatives of various donor and supporting regional and international organizations for both their financial and technical support of the Regional development and Reform Agenda. Allow me, Secretary General, Mr. Kunio Mikuriya, to re-iterate my expression of deep gratitude to the World Customs Organization for your unyielding support in building capacity in the Customs arena.

I thank you all for your attention.

**KHOTSO! PULA! NALA!**