



## **INAUGURAL SPEECH**

**BY**

**HIS EXCELLENCY PROFESSOR ARTHUR PETER  
MUTHARIKA  
THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF MALAWI**

**UPON**

**ATTENDING COMESA SUMMIT**

**18<sup>TH</sup> JULY**

It is always a great honour to be among colleagues that share a common mission as we do here. I am therefore pleased to be with you today.

As we all recall, we created the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa out of the Preferential Trade Area some 15 years ago. At this time, my brother Bingu wa Mutharika was in the secretariat.

I was privileged to work with him in the background, providing my modest legal assistance, unofficially. I remember working on the various instruments that were later to be part of the foundations of COMESA.

We recall that this organization was formed in conformity with the Lagos Plan of Action which envisaged continental economic integration in which the regional economic groupings would be the building blocks.

What we have always wanted is attaining a deeper integration as a means to social and economic progress in the region. We have learnt that there are times we achieve more by cooperating more than competing.

That does not contradict the fact that competition is in the human nature and we will always compete. Competition within the broader spirit of regional cooperation is as possible as our unity in diversity.

Let me pledge that Malawi will always play its role as Member State of this organization. We believe in being a team player.

Malawi was amongst the founding Member States who joined PTA on 21<sup>st</sup> December, 1981.

Since joining COMESA, Malawi has actively participated in COMESA's regional integration agenda.

We play a significant role in the political arena of this region. In one instance, we are playing a critical role in contributing to the promotion of the peace and security in the region.

In promoting peace and security in the region, Malawi has expressed its commitment to continue being part of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) through the SADC Force Intervention Brigade (FIB).

And we will continue to participate in various COMESA Electoral Observer Missions because we believe that the region needs a democratic environment for social and economic growth.

In addition, Malawi has successfully fielded candidates who have served in the Secretariat and various Technical Committees in this organisation. Among the notable candidature, is that of Late President Professor Bingu Wa Mutharika who served as the Secretary General of COMESA from 1992 to 1997. Malawi played its role in the foundation of this regional body.

Malawian citizens have also taken various roles in the Secretariat, as well as the Technical Committees. Recently, Bishop Mary Nkosi has successfully served a member of the Committee of Elders for a period of **three** years.

As a country, we are also doing our best to improve our economy so that we can participate in the regional economic affairs as a stronger country. But Malawi's economic path has been a steep road to climb in the last four years.

I am delighted to report that we have made progress against the odds.

When I came to lead Malawi in 2014, we found a very difficult economic situation. We had a deficit that nearly equaled our annual national budget. There was simply no money because of the massive looting of government resources that we called Cashgate.

We had to take the route of tough austerity measures, which included cutting down on travel. Regrettably, that may have limited our participation in some forums but we just had to cut down on spending in order to improve the economy.

In 2015, we had a double tragedy of national floods and drought in one year. Our crops failed and there was hunger throughout the country.

In 2016, we had another drought and crops failed again. There was national hunger.

Throughout this time, Malawi had no budgetary support from any donor. But we achieved economic recovery without donor budget support through crises of national disasters.

Four years ago, **inflation** was at 24 per cent. Today, we have managed to attain a single digit inflation.

Four years ago, interest rates were at 42 per cent. Today, **interest rates** are at 16 per cent.

We have also taken our **foreign currency import cover** from the lowest point to the highest point in our economic history. From an import cover of 2 months to an import cover now stands at 6 months. Our **local currency** is now stable and predictable.

In these few years, we have taken **GDP Growth Rate** from 2.4 per cent. In the 2018/2019 financial year, we expect growth to be at **4 percent** in 2018 and rise to **6 percent** in 2019.

We are also implementing a robust Foreign Direct Investment program. Malawi has significantly improved on the Global Doing Business Index.

Our goal is to have smaller Government and a bigger private sector. We believe this is the way the region must go.

In short, Malawi is doing everything possible to become a dependable partner and team player in the region. And we are making progress.

**I thank you for your attention.**