



**REMARKS BY MR. DUMISANI E. MASILELA,
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF SACU**

**9TH SUMMIT OF SACU HEADS OF
STATE OR GOVERNMENT**

26 JUNE 2026

CAPE TOWN

Director of Ceremonies, Honourable Parks Tau, Minister of Trade, Industry and Competition of South Africa;

Your Excellency Cyril Matamela Ramaphosa, President of the Republic of South Africa and Chairperson of the SACU Summit;

Your Majesty, King Mswati III of the Kingdom of Eswatini;

Your Excellency, Advocate Duma Gideon Boko, President of the Republic of Botswana;

Your Excellency; Dr Netumbo Nandi Ndaitwah, President of the Republic of Namibia;

The Right Honourable Sam Matekane, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Lesotho;

Honourable Ministers and Members of the SACU Council;

Honourable Members of Parliament in South Africa, present;

Your Excellencies Members of the Diplomatic Corps;

Members of the SACU Commission;

Officials of the SACU Secretariat;

Distinguished Invited Guests;

Members of the Media; and

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good Morning.

1. Allow me to express my sincere appreciation to you, Your Majesty and Excellencies, for taking time off your very busy schedules on this day, to meet and engage on the SACU Agenda.
2. Allow me to also extend a word of appreciation to our host, the Government of the Republic of South Africa, for the warm hospitality and excellent facilities put at our disposal. I also wish to thank the Members of the SACU Council of Ministers for the necessary preparations made to ensure that the 9th Summit of the SACU Heads of State or Government is a success.

Your Majesty, Your Excellencies,

3. The 9th Summit of the SACU Heads of State or Government that is taking place today, was preceded by a series of Meetings of the SACU Institutions, including the SACU Commission, a SACU Ministerial Retreat and the Meeting of the Council of Ministers, which were held from the 21st to the 25th June 2026.
4. One of the focus areas of the Summit is to receive a Report from the Council of Ministers on the progress attained towards the implementation of the SACU Strategic Plan, which was approved in June 2022.

5. You will recall, excellencies, that the Strategic Plan prioritises Industrialisation as SACU's overarching objective, to be attained through the development of regional value chains, investment attraction and export promotion. The focus on industrialisation is to broaden the region's industrial base with a view to take full advantage of the trade opportunities, including those arising from the implementation of the AfCFTA and beyond. This is even more important now in light of the paradigm shift in the trade policy landscape.

6. The implementation of the AfCFTA is one of Africa's flagship projects for achieving Africa's aspirations to build "*The Africa we want*" with the aim to boost intra-African trade and development. It provides an opportunity for the Continent to enhance its productive capacity and to build robust regional value chains to effectively supply the African market, comprising 55 countries, with an estimated 1.4 billion consumers and a GDP of more than \$3.4 trillion. SACU's industrialisation objective and ambitions are therefore rooted in this context and for this reason, SACU has placed the implementation of the AfCFTA among its top priorities.

7. It is incumbent upon the SACU private sector to seize and capitalise on this initiative. Without effective participation of the business sector, all these efforts will be meaningless. In the same vein, a regional approach to industrialisation will not only broaden the industrial production capacity, but it will also promote deeper integration, whilst ensuring inclusivity that will benefit all SACU Member States.

8. Since the adoption of the Strategic Plan in June 2022, I am pleased to report that the Secretariat and Member States have made good progress on implementation of the agreed priorities. Allow me to highlight few:
 - (a) In the area of Industrialisation, Export and Investment Promotion, the focus of our work has been on developing concrete proposals and identifying key projects for implementation in SACU to support industrialisation.
 - (b) To this end, I am pleased to report that the region has concluded the value chain mapping exercise and convened several Sectoral Roundtables on the priority sectors of Leather and Leather Products, Fruits and Vegetables, Meat and Meat Products, Textiles and Clothing, and Cosmetics and Essential Oils. At the same time, work is also on-going to undertake a developmental approach in the Pharmaceutical sector.
 - (c) Work is also currently ongoing to develop the value chain mapping on Fertilizers, Agro-Chemicals and Seed Production to ensure sustainable agricultural production, improve food security and ultimately develop strategic cross border collaborations for SACU Member States.

- (d) Considering the importance of the Automotive and complementary green Mineral Beneficiation sector in the SACU region, the SACU Council agreed, in December 2024, to frontload these two sectors to be advanced in the region and also agreed on the development of Smart Specialisation Strategies.
- (e) Work is also underway to develop the SACU Industrialisation Strategy with a view to define the milestones and expected outcomes including a strategic framework to support cross-border value chains within SACU.
- (f) Besides the work on industrialisation, SACU is implementing other equally important programmes that are aimed at facilitating cross-border trade through specific programmes such as the SACU Trade Facilitation and Logistics Programme, specifically designed to create a conducive trading environment for the traders in the region.
- (g) Under this programme, significant milestones have been achieved under Customs-to-Customs cooperation agenda. These achievements include interoperability of Customs Management Systems across Member States, enabling automated exchange of customs data and enhanced visibility of cross-border transactions, thereby improving efficiencies in trade processing and risk management. SACU has also undertaken several successful joint enforcement operations over the years targeting illicit trade, thus contributing to revenue protection and collection while removing harmful and non-compliant products from circulation within the Common Customs Area.

- (h) Furthermore, SACU has accredited more than one thousand traders under the Authorised Economic Operator (AEO) Programme and commenced piloting the Mutual Recognition Arrangement (MRA), which aims to strengthen safety and security across regional supply chains while facilitating legitimate trade. These initiatives underscore an important lesson: as trust and cooperation between government authorities and the private sector increase, compliance improves, and the management of illicit trade becomes more effective within a trusted trading environment.
- (i) Notwithstanding these successes, a key area requiring intensified efforts remains the integration of Other Government Agencies (OGAs) into the regional trade facilitation and logistics agenda, alongside Customs to Customs cooperation. This is critical to ensuring that progress achieved through the Customs Modernisation Programme translates into overarching improvement in the trading environment ultimately experienced by traders at border posts. Without coordinated action, gains made through Customs excellence risk being constrained or offset by slower processes and fragmented procedures administered by other agencies mandated to facilitate trade.
- (j) To address these challenges, SACU has adopted a revised Trade Facilitation and Logistics Programme with an expanded scope that extends beyond Customs-to-Customs cooperation to incorporate Other Government Agencies under a coordinated Border Management approach. The Programme also places significant emphasis on Infrastructure Development as a critical enabler of trade facilitation, focusing on both soft and hard infrastructure required to modernise key commercial border posts and ports of entry that serve as strategic trade corridors within the region.

- (k) In this regard, SACU is developing a regional approach to identify, prioritise, and package infrastructure initiatives into bankable projects. Priority areas under consideration include the development of One Stop Border Posts, implementation of National and Regional Single Window systems, and the rehabilitation of critical road infrastructure linking Member States. In parallel, SACU is exploring the concept of a Seamless Non-Stop Border Trade Environment aimed at transforming the movement of goods across the region through greater integration, automation, and harmonisation of border processes. It is anticipated that a clearer policy direction and implementation pathway for this concept will be established by the end of the 2026/27 financial year.

- (l) In addition, SACU is advancing its trade modernisation agenda through the development of a Regional Framework for Trade Digitalisation and Digital Transformation, which will provide a strategic roadmap for the adoption of digital technologies to facilitate trade, improve regulatory efficiency, and enhance the competitiveness of the region. SACU is also undertaking work to develop practical tools, frameworks, and mechanisms to streamline the administration of Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) measures, Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT), and Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs), with the objective of reducing administrative bottlenecks, improving regulatory coordination, and facilitating the smoother movement of goods across the Common Customs Area.

9. These are but some of the Programmes we are currently implementing.
10. I wish also to highlight Your Majesty, Excellencies, that the Summit will also have an opportunity to receive an update on the re-imagined SACU initiative, which was agreed to at the last Summit held on the 29th June 2023, in Eswatini. This centered around governance issues of tariff-setting, regional export strategy, financing for industrialisation, and management of the Common Revenue Pool.
11. While efforts have been made at the level of the Council and the Commission, to conclude on this matter, we are behind schedule. This notwithstanding, we are grateful that the Heads of State and Government will have an opportunity today, to reflect on the matter and provide guidance on how to move our regional Agenda forward.
12. Allow me to also highlight that SACU has undertaken a midterm review of its Strategic Plan 2022-2027 in April 2026 with a view to assess progress, challenges and strategise on a way forward. The overall review indicates that we remain on track to attain our agreed goals although there are few challenges including availability of financial resources to finance our programme, including the required soft and hard infrastructures. An important decision of the Council was the extension of the Strategic Plan period from 2027 to 2029 to allow outstanding work to be carried out.

13. As I conclude, Your Majesty, Excellencies, allow me at this point to, on behalf of the entire SACU family, convey my gratitude to His Excellency President Cyril Matamela Ramaphosa and indeed the entire Summit, for the leadership and guidance that the Secretariat has received during South Africa's term as the Chair of SACU since July 2025 to date. I do look forward to your continued support in that regard Mr. President.
14. Equally, I wish to express my deep appreciation and gratitude to the SACU Council of Ministers, and Members of the SACU Commission for their support in ensuring that the SACU Strategic Plan is successfully implemented. Their full engagement and commitment has invigorated the Union and as the Secretariat, we commit to supporting this level of commitment for a successful delivery of our regional development objectives.
15. Finally, I also wish to thank all officials involved in organising this event, as well as the officials from the SACU Secretariat for preparing the background documents.
16. I thank you for your kind attention.