



**ADDRESS BY THE SPEAKER OF THE ECOWAS PARLIAMENT
H.E. RIGHT HONOURABLE SIDIE MOHAMED TUNIS**

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE OPENING OF THE MEETING OF THE JOINT
COMMITTEES ON: ADMINISTRATION, FINANCE, AND BUDGET,
MACROECONOMIC POLICIES & ECONOMIC RESEARCH, PUBLIC
ACCOUNTS, TRADE, CUSTOMS & FREE MOVEMENT**

**COTONOU, BENIN
3rd NOVEMBER 2020**

H.E. Honorable Louis Vlavonou, Speaker of the National Assembly of Benin

Honorable Commissioner for Trade, ECOWAS Commission

H.E. Mr. Aurelien Agbenonci, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation

H. E. Mrs. Shadiya Alimatou Assouman, Minister for Industry and Trade

Other Officials of Government

Members of the Forth Estate

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

It gives me a great pleasure to be in the beautiful and resourceful city of Cotonou in furtherance of our service to the Community. I wish to express my deepest appreciation to all of you for your presence here today.

Permit me at this juncture to extend my best wishes and heartfelt appreciation to the President of the Republic, His Excellency President Patrice Talon, for graciously accepting to host the ECOWAS Parliament. I equally wish to appreciate the wonderful people of Benin Republic for the political stability this country enjoys today. Yours is a classic example of what a nation can achieve if all of its people decide to work together for the good of the State.

Again, I wish to recognize the presence of my brother and colleagues, the Honourable Speaker of the Benin National Assembly, His Excellency Honorable Louis Vlavonou. I equally wish to appreciate the presence of

other Government Officials, Experts, Invited Guests and Members of the Fourth Estate realm to this important meeting.

Excellencies

Distinguished Guests

It is with heavy heart that I recall the death of a former member of the ECOWAS Parliament from the Republic of Liberia, Honorable Mabutu Vlah Nyepan, who died on 30th October as result of a brief illness. He diligently served the 3rd Legislature and we remember his services to our region. May his soul and the souls of all faithful departed rest in peace.

Excellencies

Distinguished Guests,

Members of the ECOWAS Parliament have converged on Cotonou to hold two meetings:

- i. A meeting of the Bureau of Parliament to consider and adopt the draft budget of the Parliament for the 2021 fiscal year, which started yesterday Monday 2nd November, 2020; and
- ii. A Delocalized meeting of the Joint Committee under the theme “ African Continental Free Trade Area, How Feasible in the face of Cross-Border Threats.

I thank the Chairpersons of all the Committees involved, the Secretary General and the entire staff of the ECOWAS Parliament, for preparing these meetings with diligence and commitment.

In the coming days Participants would have the opportunity to receive update on current developments relating to the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). It would also enable them gain better understanding of challenges and prospects concerning the implementation of the AfCFTA.

The Continental Free Trade Area is the culmination of a vision set forth nearly 40 years ago in the Lagos Plan of Action, adopted by Heads of State in 1980. That initiative directly led to the Abuja Treaty establishing the African Economic Community in 1991.

It is gratifying to state that the Government of the Republic of Ghana generously offered a building to house the headquarters of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), an act which demonstrates a strong affirmation of the vision of an integrated Africa. The establishment of the headquarters in one of our Member States and by extension our region, provides an even greater opportunity to explore the possibilities of having a region that practices trade in a free and secure manner.

Excellencies

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Notwithstanding the benefits of free trade, there are visible threats which stall progress and create stumbling blocks to investments that in turn affect commerce and employment. Among these are terrorism and insecurity which increase uncertainty and raise the cost of goods and services.

Terrorism slows the flow of goods and resources through ports due to greater inspections and safeguard and divert government expenditures from more productive public investment to less productive security activities.

In addition to terrorism, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has also affected the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement. Beyond its impact on human health, the pandemic has disrupted an interconnected world economy. Since the emergence of the pandemic, there has been an abrupt fall in commodity prices, fiscal revenues, foreign exchange receipts, foreign financial flows, travel restrictions, a decline in tourism and hotels, and so on. Border closures have reduced economic activities and there are predictions of recession across the continent.

In the midst of all of these, what is at stake is the dignity and well-being of Africa's farmers, workers and entrepreneurs, particularly women and youths. The promise of free trade is prosperity for all Africans, particularly West Africans, because it provides a prospect for the production of value-added goods and services, increase in income and better living conditions for our citizens.

I am therefore hopeful that this meeting will enlighten us all on these important issues and provide Parliament sufficient resources on the prospects of implementing the African Continental Free Trade Agreement. The ECOWAS Parliament will also be acquainted on the role it should play in mitigating challenges and facilitating the application of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA).

Excellencies

Distinguished Guests

I urge us to use this opportunity to further our commitment at ensuring that the benefits of free trade accrue to our region and its people. I am optimistic that we will recover from the shackles of COVID-19 and our economies will grow stronger and better. The road to achieving this is not going to be smooth, but I am reminded of the great things we have achieved as a Community of People and I have no doubt, that this is achievable.

I thank you for your attention and once again thank the Government and People of the Republic of Benin for hosting us.

God Bless ECOWAS

I thank you