

# **Welcoming Remarks by Hon. Mou Mou Athian Kuol**

## **EABC Multi-Stakeholder Meeting**

**10<sup>th</sup> May 2018**

**Hon. Minister**, Ministry of Trade, Industry and EAC Affairs

**Mr. Jim Mwine Kabeho**, Chairman, East African Business Council

**Distinguished guests,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen:**

Welcome to you all, especially our visitors from the East African Business Council. Your determination to visit South Sudan in the middle of the ongoing challenging situation demonstrates your courage and sense of solidarity, which for us is a source of hope and inspiration in our determination to have a common destiny as East Africans. So thank you so much for the brotherly gesture.

I also thank my fellow South Sudanese government officials and representatives from the South Sudan private sector for taking the time to join us today.

This visit from the East African Business Council is extremely important. As the prospects of South Sudan joining the EAC became apparent, those who are opposed to it refused to see the potential of the EAC in bringing about total transformation of the country.

Instead, they dismissed South Sudan's decision to apply for EAC membership as well as the region's decision to admit South Sudan as "simply political."

These critics could not imagine that ordinary hard-working entrepreneurs such as the businessmen represented in this room could find value in the integration agenda. For these people, their only view of the EAC is that of the 1970s when EAC was driven by political rivalry among leaders of the three members at the time – Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania.

While the current EAC still has a dream of ultimately realizing a political federation, it must be understood that this dream is not an end in itself. Rather, every stage of the EAC integration i.e. formation of a Customs Union; establishing a common market; the ongoing effort to create a Monetary Union; and ultimately Political federation are all geared toward realizing the region's vision for a complete socio-economic transformation of the members and its citizens.

As some of you who participated in the negotiations will recall, the EAC integration agenda is driven by the principles of people-centred and market-driven integration.

People-centred development is an approach that aims at achieving people's economic self-reliance, social justice, and participatory decision-making. And by market-driven integration, the EAC

wants to see the private sector take the driver's seat in realizing economic growth. It is for this reason that when we were invited to negotiate our admission to the EAC, we made sure that both civil society organization and more so the private sector is adequately represented in every discussion.

Thus, far from trying to interfere with the private sector, these fundamental principles of EAC integration require Partner States to focus on creating the enabling environment for the private sector to thrive and become the engine of socio-economic development.

That said, it is also true that creating an enabling environment is not an easy task. Governments and governmental organizations worldwide need to be pushed and guided by the private sector in order to institute the appropriate reforms that will work in favour of the greater majority.

It is out of this self-realization that the EAC leadership in collaboration with the private sector organizations in member countries, advocated and supported the formation of the East African Business Council to provide a unified voice on issues affecting the growth of the private sector within the region.

As an important voice in the integration process, South Sudan is not and will never be a full member of the EAC unless it is equally represented in the EABC.

Following our formal admission to the EAC in 2016, I am also aware of the ongoing effort to ensure that South Sudan is also represented in the EABC membership. However, two years down the road, we are yet to see South Sudan take its rightful place in the EABC.

It is my sincere hope that today's meeting, having been attended by all the relevant stakeholders, will, among other things, deliberate on finding a solution to South Sudan's continued state of isolation from the EABC. Joining the EABC will be useful in many ways:

- To the emerging South Sudanese entrepreneurs, being a part of the EABC will fast-track your integration into the East African business environment with minimum risk. As we are already in the community, you need to move faster into order up with counterparts. Joining the EABC is therefore critical to your survival as traders and investors in this big swimming pool called the East African Community. The EABC is your lifeguard and sometimes a swimming teacher. So you have the choice to register and benefit from its services or continue to swim on your own. But just remember that you are no longer by the pool-side, you are already in the pool and perhaps in the deeper end of it.
- For us as government, the EABC is also important. As we embark on implementing our commitments within the EAC, South Sudan will need to undertake a number of policy and regulatory reforms. We want the voice of the private sector to

be heard right from the beginning; and this voice cannot only be the voice of South Sudanese traders and investors, but the voice of all East African entrepreneurs who will do business in South Sudan at any point in time.

With these remarks, allow me again to thank the EABC delegates and all of you for creating time for this important gathering.

I would also like to thank everyone involved in organizing this meeting, especially Ms. Lilian Awinja, from the EABC and Mr. Alex Lubajo from the our EAC Office who worked very closely to ensure that today's meeting come to pass.

Last but not least, please join me in thanking Mr. John Bosco Kalisa and his TMEA team for the financial and logistical support.

Again welcome and I wish you fruitful deliberations!