

Rt Hon. Amama Mbabazi the Prime Minister of Uganda lunches the COMESA Innovation Council

LUSAKA, ZAMBIA - The Prime Minister of Uganda, Rt Hon. Amama Mbabazi officially launched the COMESA Innovation Council 08 April 2013, in Kampala, Uganda. The Prime Minister represented the President of Uganda His Excellency Yoweri Museveni the Chair of the COMESA Authority of Head of States.

The primary responsibility of the council is to provide advice to Member States relating to existing and new knowledge and innovations, and best ways of applying the knowledge and innovations in the Member States for economic development. The Council will be responsible, in addition, for choosing winners of the COMESA Innovation Award, which should be given annually.

Earlier on the same day the Bureau of the Council of the COMESA Ministers responsible for Science, Technology and Innovation appointed three other members to fully constitute the Innovation Council. The fully constituted Innovation Council comprises:

Prof. Venasius Baryamureeba (Uganda) - Chairperson

Dr Dhanjay Jhurry (Mauritius) – Vice Chairperson

Dr Jonathan M. Tambatamba (Zambia) - Rapportuer

Prof. Aggrey Ambali (Malawi)

Prof. Lydia Makhubu (Swaziland)

Prof. Marie Claire Yandju (DRC)

Prof. Meoli Kashorda (Kenya)

Mr Mohammed El-Sayed Aboud (Egypt)

Mr Micheal Savy (Seychelles); and

Prof. Chris C Mutambirwa (Zimbabwe).

Prime Minister Mbabazi stated that the creation of the COMESA Innovation Council represents a landmark in Africa's institutional history for two important reasons. First, it is the first major political recognition of the critical role that technological innovation can play in enhancing Africa's global competitiveness. But more importantly, the advisory council that I am going to inaugurate today is made up of African experts. This is a break from the past when such advisory functions would normally be performed by consultants or experts from international agencies.

He noted that Africa is developing in an era where reliance is continuously being placed on knowledge and information as a prerequisite for growth and competitiveness and shifting away from dependence on what have been traditional factors for production.

“Today there is a very large pool of scientific and technological knowledge at the disposal of African region that can be deployed for economic development, so there is a need for Africa to leap-frog in development by virtue of being a technology latecomer,” Prime Minister Mbabazi said.

He added that Africa has the potential to access more knowledge than any of our predecessors had when they embarked on the path of industrialization. However, low level of investment in training in engineering, sciences, infrastructure development and the lack of venture capital to turn ideas into products for the market place are slowing down Africa industrialization. He challenged the members of the Innovation Council to provide practical ideas for promoting innovation in the region.

The COMESA ASG (Programmes), Ambassador Cheluget Kipyego, paid special tribute to the Government of the Republic of Uganda, and to President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, who is the Chairperson of the COMESA Authority, for hosting the meeting and for the hospitality extended to the distinguished guests.

He noted that the inauguration ceremony was a testimony to COMESA’s commitment to enhancing science and technology in the region. He further noted that the institution of the Innovation Council is recognition of the critical urgency of putting in place mechanisms for harnessing and mobilizing existing knowledge and expertise; and doing this in a structured manner that will make the region remain competitive in this fast changing world.

“Sustained economic development requires diversification, which is precisely where entrepreneurship and innovation play a complimentary role in contributing to economic prosperity and social cohesion. Indeed, these two objectives cannot be divided if a government is to deliver increased welfare to its people,” he said.

Ambassador Kipyego concluded by saying that the contribution of entrepreneurship and innovation to economic prosperity has grown with the shift of the global economy towards a mode of production in which knowledge has become a key input.

“The challenges of the knowledge economy originally interested the most advanced economies, but are now critical to growth in emerging economies as well. Therefore, new non-technological forms of innovation such as new marketing strategies and organizational improvements that do not require large investment in research and development enable small firms to participate more actively in the innovation process, enhancing their contribution to productivity,” he said.

The Minister of Information, Communication Technology, Uganda, Dr Ruhakana Rugunda, said that the video link message delivered during the meeting, from Prof. Calestous Juma of the Harvard Kennedy School, was an indication of how science and technology are simplifying the lives of people.

“It is now up to the Innovation Council to ensure that such technology is readily available for all to use effectively,” he said.

Dr Rugunda added that the evolution of science and technology has over the years been a result of continuous efforts to create new services, so it is vital for the Innovation Council to help the Member States keep up with the latest trends in technology and innovation.

He reiterated the Government of Uganda’s commitment to assisting the Innovation Council, during its tenure as the Chair of the COMESA Authority.

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