

EAC Headquarters, Monday 21 January 2008: The Secretary General of the East African Community, Ambassador Juma Mwapachu has wound up a three-day (17-19 January) visit to the Tanzanian border towns of Bukoba, Mutukula and Mwanza with a call on the Immigration, Police and Revenue authorities in the EAC border regions to get on the frontline of the effort to promote cross-border trade and free movement of persons in the region.

The Secretary General said that the EAC Customs Union which was launched in 2005 and the advanced preparations towards the realization of the EAC Common Market by 2010, had established a conducive environment for increased intra-EAC trade and free movement of persons. He said the EAC Partner States already have agreed a substantial number of measures which, with diligent application by the relevant authorities in the field, should vastly ease customs and trade flow within the East African region.

The Secretary General cited the requirements of Business Visa, temporary visa and import duties and declaration fees on various products, as among the requirements that have been removed or eased and whose continued enforcement by some officers at the border posts in the Partner States was causing frustrations to the business community, hindering cross-border trade and movement and drawing back the regional integration and development process.

The Secretary General said the Temporary Visa charges previously levied by immigration authorities had since June 2007 been removed and retained only as temporary work permits for those entering Tanzania for "temporary assignments". He said the levies were no longer applicable to traders, transporters and visitors who are not seeking temporary employment in Tanzania. Similarly, the Import Declaration Fee on imports from Uganda and Kenya was removed in June 2007.

The Secretary General said the EAC Partner States have adopted the EAC harmonized Standards for goods traded within the region which has been enacted into law and provides for mutual recognition of national quality marks on products by each of the Bureaus of Standards. The mechanism agreed by the Partner States for application of the Standards should be implemented without subjecting the goods to vigorous verification upon importation once they bear the quality marks.

On road transport, the Secretary General said a grace period of seven days without payment of Temporary Road Licence is allowed for Uganda and Kenya registered vehicles entering Tanzania under the 1998 East African Tripartite Agreement on Road Transport which is still in force.

The Secretary General said the Immigration, Police and Revenue authorities at the border posts should constantly update themselves on the decisions of the EAC Council of Ministers concerning cross-border trade and movement in order to ensure compliance with and effective implementation of the decisions. He said the decisions were usually communicated through the EAC Gazette and the circulars issued by the relevant Ministries of the Partner States.

The Secretary General said the EAC would step up its public communications about the EAC decisions through targeted publications. He said the EAC is due to revamp its Website to deliver

up to date business information on the EAC region. Other measures that will be immediately implemented include closer monitoring by the EAC of the implementation of the regional projects and programmes on the ground.

The Secretary General was accompanied during the visit to the Tanzania border areas by the EAC Director of Customs Mr Kenneth Bagamuhunda, the Head of the EAC Directorate of Corporate Communications and Public Affairs Mr Magaga Alot, the Principal Administration Officer Mr Abdul Katabaro and the Chef de Cabinet Mr Henry Obbo.

During the visit the Secretary General called on the Regional Commissioner of Mwanza Region, Dr James Msekela, and the District Commissioner of Missenyi in Kagera region Mr. E.K. Maarugu; and also addressed meetings with Immigration, Police and Revenue authorities as well as the representatives of the business communities in Bukoba, Mutukula and Mwanza.

The Secretary General said the visit had revealed important details concerning the implementation of the Customs Union and other regional programmes on the ground. He said the problems encountered by the business community would be promptly attended to and brought before the EAC Council of Ministers for solutions to be worked out.

The Secretary General visited the Mwanza port where he was briefed on the special operations at the port to keep supplies of vital commodities, including petroleum, foodstuffs and general merchandise flowing to Uganda following disruptions of services from the port of Mombasa during the current political disturbances in Kenya. The Secretary General also inspected the EAC research vessel RV Jumuiya which has started operations in mapping and survey of Lake Victoria for safety of navigation and monitoring fisheries resources and environmental conditions on the lake.

Directorate of Corporate Communications and Public Affairs

EAC Secretariat

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