

**SPEECH BY HON. SAMUEL SITTA (MP), MINISTER FOR EAST
AFRICAN CO-OPERATION, AT THE CONSULTATIVE MEETING OF
THE REGIONAL LEVEL OF THE VISION EAST AFRICA FORUM,
HELD AT THE KIBO PALACE HOTEL, ARUSHA TANZANIA - 5TH
AND 6TH OCTOBER 2011**

*Hon. Ambassador Dr. Richard Sezibera, the Secretary General of
the EAC,*

*Dr. Stefan Chrobot, Resident Director of Friedrich-Ebert-
Stiftung Tanzania,*

*Representatives of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung based in
Uganda and in Tanzania,*

*Members of the Coordinating Team of the EAC Vision Group,
Tanzania Chapter,*

*Participants from Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, Kenya and host
Tanzania*

Invited Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Please accept my profound gratitude to the EAC Vision Group-Tanzania Chapter and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) for inviting me to attend at the opening ceremony of this important and historic consultative meeting of the Vision East Africa Forum.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a special pleasure for me to welcome our distinguished guests to Tanzania in particular to Arusha. Please feel at home and spare some of your time to enjoy the natural heritage of this part of Tanzania and the hospitality of its people. I was privileged to be the Guest of Honor at the launch of the Tanzania National Chapter of the EAC Vision Group in Dar es Salaam, on the 21st April, 2011. So I feel immensely privileged to have been invited to speak at this auspicious day of the official launch of the Regional Level Consultative Meeting of the Vision East Africa Forum. I sincerely thank the organizers and supporters of this event, EAC Vision Group – Tanzania Chapter and FES, among others. I also thank the participants for having set aside your valuable time and resources to be part of this historical occasion.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am informed that you are assembled here to deliberate the formation a regional level Think Tank/ Study Group/ Discussion Forum for formulating strategies and constructive ideas on the on-going East African Community integration efforts. If I would prefer that you went for a Think Tank rather than a Study Group or Discussion Group. When I launched the EAC Vision Group, Tanzania National Chapter, I remarked that the relevance of independent civil society organizations such as the EAC Vision Group would springs from its contribution of new ideas and evidence-based best practice on how the objectives of the EAC could be

achieved. Therefore, it goes without saying that such an endeavor requires a Think Tank and not merely a Study Group or Discussion Group. So far we do not have a Think Tank for the Community that can generate well researched ideas for the betterment of our people. Many serious East Africans will be happy if your new organization will fill this gap.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I recall during the launch of Tanzania National Chapter of the EAC Vision Group, I was informed that the goal was to **aspire** for, and **inspire**, the establishment of National Chapters in all Partner States. Furthermore, there was a commitment that once National Chapters in at least one or two more Partner States had been established, a process would be initiated to establish a regional forum. It gives me pleasure and satisfaction to note that, with the proactive cooperation of FES offices in Uganda and Kenya, we have now in place National Chapters in Kenya and Uganda which now create the foundation for the formation of a regional forum at this meeting. I am equally happy to note that you have invited participants from Rwanda and Burundi and that FES offices in Kenya and Uganda have agreed to assist in establishing national Chapters Rwanda and Burundi. This is a tremendous achievement attained in a very short timeframe. I presume that you will spend the next two days to discuss in detail the mission, goals and an action plan of the regional forum.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I observed five months ago, when launching the Tanzania Chapter your efforts in seeking to establish this critical and independent thinking platform will only be relevant if it is used to articulate the interests and aspirations of the people of East Africa on how to alleviate poverty and promote good governance. Thus, whatever you do and articulate you should not lose sight of the shared and fundamental belief that the EAC integration project was conceived in order to accelerate the socio-economic development of our people. In this regard, the establishment of VISION EAST AFRICA should not be seen as an end in itself but a tool for continuously articulating those goals and keeping alive the hope of a better future for all East Africans. In this context, VISION EAST AFRICA FORUM, could **analyze** regional Projects and programmes and related implementation processes with a view to **identifying** the missing links in addressing poverty and governance in the region; **promote and demand** people's participation in the integration process, and **act as a catalyst** in promoting people-centered regionalism.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my understanding that the VISION EAST AFRICA FORUM will not seek to replace or duplicate the commendable advocacy work currently being carried out by the East African Civil Society Organizations' Forum (EACSOFF) or that of the East African Business Council or the East African Trade Union Council (EATUC). Thus, the value addition expected of VISION EAST AFRICA FORUM is to provide evidence based critical

support to the above-mentioned civil society and other non-state sector actors.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Personally, I have no doubt that VISION EAST AFRICA FORUM will be a crucial civil society support group helping to sensitize East Africans on the benefits as well as the challenges of continuing to widen and to deepen EAC integration. I wish to call upon the Community and Partner States to make use of the rich expertise and ideas embodied in the membership of VISION EAST AFRICA FORUM to enhance the pace and quality of East African integration.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I truly wish you all the best in your deliberations. As I promised to the Tanzania National Chapter, I extend to the regional VISION EAST AFRICA FORUM Government's readiness to work with you, and to support your efforts in the common endeavor of promoting a prosperous and peaceful EAC integration process.

I trust you will all have meaningful deliberations which will add value to East African integration.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for your kind attention.