Africa's industrial revolution is now, declares Museveni

WHAT HAD DELAYED AFRICA?

Museveni said Africa had for long time been grossly underpopulated, affecting trade and innovation

By Edward Kayiwa

President Yoweri Museveni has said the time for Africa to fully industrialise and influence the world has come, given that it is now waking up from the reigns of colonialism, slave trade and disunity.

Museveni said because of its many problems, the continent missed out on the industrial revolution that has greatly changed the economies of the developed world, and kept them ahead of Africa.

During the fourth World Customs Organisation Authorised Economic Operators (AEO) conference at the Kampala Serena Hotel yesterday, he said the continent had for a long time been grossly under populated, affecting trade and innovation, which are key factors in social economic development.

The President cited the case of India, which is 12 times smaller than Africa, yet its population is way bigger compared to Africa.

"I am, however, glad that the problem of a small population is being solved because we have recently hit 1.25 billion people, and are expected to grow much more in the coming years," he said.

According to the World Bank statistics, the population of Africa is expected to hit approximately 2.5 billion people by 2050.

Museveni said the continent had for long been absent in international trade mainly because of slave trade and colonialism which negatively influenced it for many years.

"But now that we are waking up, we will never miss out on any other opportunity to equally participate on a global platform to positively impact the lives of our people," he said.

He said the continent had formed regional unity blocks such as the East African Community (EAC) to help it participate positively in global trade, technological innovation, governance and poverty alleviation.

"The EAC now boasts about 180 million people, and the rest of the continent is growing, uniting and heading into the industrial and digital revolution. This is now our time," he said.

The global AEO conference gathers representatives from customs administrations, the business community, governments as well as policymakers and academicians to discuss the challenges of customs and the private sector in implementing AEO programmes.

According to the Uganda Revenue Authority (URA), Uganda was chosen to be the first country to host the AEO conference in Africa because it runs the most mature programme on the continent.

Approximately 1,500 delegates from 169 customs organisations from Europe, Africa, the Americas and Asia are attending the three-day conference to discuss mutual recognition of AEOs and secure global trade.

The URA commissioner general, Doris Akol, said recognition of Ugandan economic operators by other global customs authorities is a sign of confidence in the country and will help to ease clearing processes and costs.

She said the conference also supplements the country's trade facilitation efforts, and is expected to secure new trade opportunities for Ugandan businesses across the world.

"Mutual recognition will give our authorised operators the same benefits as are accrued to them here. This means that they can do their own tax assessments, which then saves time and also earns them preferential treatment by other customs organisations across the world," she said.

AEOs are businesses certified by customs administrations to do self-assessment in relation to compliance with customs rules.

Uganda has 36 local operators with another 46 at the East Africa regional level under the regional mutual recognition agreement.

Akol said Ugandan AEOs contribute 19% of all revenue collections, and nearly 28% of all customs cargo annually.



First Lady Janet Museveni greets Mikuriya as President Museveni (right), Anite (third-right) Akol (third-left) and Kateshumbwa (left) look on. This was after the fourth AEO conference at Kampala Serena Hotel yesterday. PPU photo

HOW PREPARED IS AFRICA?

The continent has formed regional unity blocks such as the East African Community to help it participate positively in global trade, technological innovation and poverty alleviation

The World Customs Organisation secretary general, Kunio Mikuriya, said the unity of the EAC customs union gives the entire world the zeal to look for trade opportunities and to contribute to its social economic development.

He said the region had huge potential for investment and economic development, because of the forward-looking policies drafted at the regional and country levels.

He, however, cautioned national revenue authorities in the EAC to consolidate their relationships with the business community in order to realise sufficient revenue collections.

"The revenue authority in Uganda, for example, has been making a lot of effort to digitise its processes and this is attracting a lot of people to explore opportunities in the country. However, the relationship with the people is what will deliver value for the investment made, and needs to be consolidated more," he said.

The URA commissioner for customs, Dicksons Kateshumbwa, said the AEO was being implemented in 77 countries at both national and regional levels in Africa, with Uganda operating the most mature programme in Africa.

Kateshumbwa said Uganda had implemented other trade facilitation initiatives such as the single customs territory, one-stop border post, regional electronic cargo tracking system, document processing centre and the electronic single window.

Previously, AEO global conferences have been held in Seoul, South Korea in 2012, Madrid, Spain in 2014, and Cancun, Mexico in 2016.

CamScanner