

Speech: Opening of 3rd General Assembly of Afrimets, 15 July 2009 - Valley Lodge, Magaliesburg.
By: Dr T Demana, Chief Director from the dti, South Africa

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my pleasure to welcome at this opening session of the 3rd General Assembly of AFRIMETS - Intra-Africa Metrology System.

I want to welcome all the representatives from the 6 sub regional metrology organisations in the Intra Africa Metrology System (AFRIMETS), and especially mention the latest to join AFRIMETS, namely NEWMET, which includes Egypt, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Ghana, Libya and Sudan as well as all our international guests.

This initiative on the Intra Africa Metrology System bodes well for Intra-African integration, industrialisation and global trade.

The role of Metrology in international trade through the ability to demonstrate accurate and traceable measurements is known to all of you. Most of you attending this General Assembly have firsthand experience of products that were refused entry into a market because for instance, the maximum residue levels in foodstuffs were disputed after testing was done in the recipient country. We are all aware of the melamine in milk from China incident, which necessitated a change in our testing protocols.

In the South African context, the National Metrology Institute of South Africa fulfils the role of providing measurement traceability in South Africa and the region, with the support of the accredited metrology, calibration, testing and analytical community.

The Legal Metrology department at the National Regulator for Compulsory Specifications are equally important by fulfilling its mandate of ensuring the orderly conduct of commerce and the protection of consumers and other participants in the market for goods and services by ensuring equity and

correctness in trade transactions based on measurements of quantity, and that products are correctly labelled.

With commodity based economies that relies heavily on metal, oil, diamonds and agro exports, Africa's market access encompasses (i) intra-African trade; (ii) Africa's trade with other countries and regions; and (iii) the diversification of exports. In this regard we in Africa are facing a huge challenge to stay abreast of technological developments and increasing health, safety and environmental requirements that developed countries demand.

This directly relates to our ability to prove measurement equivalence and provide analytical assurances for export products. Therefore the international linkages that AFRIMETS could provide to the analytical community are of inestimable value, and the impact on increasing trade could be huge.

I want to commend you on your model, which I understand is based on cooperation, mutual learning and support amongst the different sub regions within Africa. The harmonisation of standards, pooling of resources, using accreditation to confirm competency and assist with the acceptance of certificates and test reports and general awareness creation will benefit the measurement system of the continent and provide a platform for competing with Europe, the Americas and Asia.

You have made great strides since the formation of AFRIMETS in 2007. The fact that AFRIMETS has a total membership of 44 countries in Africa and that it obtained international recognition from the International Committee of Weights and Measures (CIPM) as the regional metrology organisation representing Africa in October 2008, illustrates this.

It is important for Africa to devise indigenous solutions. Notably incorporating both scientific and legal metrology in one structure such as AFRIMETS illustrates a pragmatic approach to optimise the use of resources.

We should all strive to build the necessary capacity within our sub regions. It should be fit for purpose. We should come up with sub regional solutions and facilities for common challenges, instead of duplicating facilities, where it is not warranted by trade volumes. In order to achieve this goal, government support is essential for the establishment and maintenance of metrology infrastructure.

We should also ensure alignment with the standards and accreditation work in Africa. I thus encourage AFRIMETS to also establish links with the African Standards Organisation and the Inter-African Cooperation for Accreditation in order to cooperate to establish a suitable environment for the production of quality goods and services, thus contributing to the industrial development in Africa, the progressive elimination of technical barriers to trade amongst the African sub regions and supporting African enterprises to export their goods to developed countries.

I encourage you to get involved and participate in the work of AFRIMETS, whether it is through regional comparisons, defining metrology strategy or participating in appropriate working groups.

I want to assure you of my department's continued support, nationally through the work of the National Metrology Institute of South Africa and the Legal Metrology department of the National Regulator for Compulsory Specifications, regionally through our membership of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and its relevant structures to AFRIMETS and internationally through our membership of the International Bureau of Weights and Measures (BIPM) and the Organisation for Legal Metrology (OIML).

Together we can achieve more.