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MUGABE-CURRENCY

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT MUST NOT BE THREATENED BY CURRENCY TRADING

By: Abdul Muin Abdul Majid

VICTORIA FALLS (Zimbabwe) Oct 4 (Bernama) -- President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe said no economic empowerment initiatives could thrive under the threat of unregulated currency trading.

He said the situation was made worse by the crippling foreign debt burden currently weighing down on most developing economies.

Mugabe said the experiences of both Asia and southern and eastern Africa's worst financial crises in the last two years, spawned by foreign currency speculators and hedge funds, had alerted developing nations to the danger of exposing their markets and financial systems.

"Indeed, we now demand serious reform to the global financial system in order to stop or regulate currency trading," he said when opening the Third Southern Africa International Dialogue (SAID 99) at the Elephant Hills Inter-Continental Hotel, here, Sunday night.

Among those present at the function was Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who has repeatedly voiced Malaysia's stand that currency trading needs to be regulated after the economies in East Asia were ravaged by currency traders and stock market manipulators beginning July 1997.

Mugabe said the essence of smart partnerships for most of the region's newly independent states could not have meaningful significance unless it bore in its contents the elements of empowerment.

"In some of our regional areas with their colonial history, the empowerment process is about removing race and ethnic-based economic disparities for social and economic justice to prevail," he said.

The president said that besides economic growth, other benefits of economic empowerment envisaged included breaking the poverty cycle and associated social ills like crime.

Mugabe also said the deliberations of SAID 99 should go beyond the formal business sector to include the struggling informal traders, including cross-border traders.

"The development of just a few anchor projects in each of the regional economic cross-border corridors would have a significant multiplier effect as other smaller investments move in to provide ancillary services," he added.

In a message read at the function, Commonwealth Secretary-General Chief Emeka Anyaoku said smart partnering to generate wealth could provide an avenue to overcome some of the uncertainties in the global environment.

He said the dialogue would continue the process of developing a dynamic smart partnership hub in southern Africa to promote the region's competitiveness in global markets.

Under the theme "Win-Win Africa: Economic Empowerment Through Smart Partnership", SAID 99 will translate regional initiatives into meaningful and practical application.

In tackling the region's economic recovery needs, SAID 99 will prepare a blueprint that will translate smart partnerships into tangible action-oriented programmes to empower indigenous entrepreneurs and small- and medium-size enterprises.

Among the objectives of the dialogue held in this town, whose tourism activities centre on the majestic Victoria Falls and the nearby national park, are examining the various aspects of economic empowerment from the perspective of smart partnership at regional, national and corporate levels and developing a common understanding of the implications of economic

empowerment and a general framework for concrete action.

New to SAID 99 are the dialogue between the heads of state and government and the media, the Smart Partnership Business Dialogue and the Smart Partnership Social Issues Dialogue.

The first SAID was held in Botswana followed by last year's edition in Namibia. It is modelled after the Langkawi International Dialogue. --

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