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Uganda, WFP agree on trans-african logistic mobility

The Government, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the transport ministry, together with World Food Programme (WFP) have rolled out a trans-African emergency response mobility programme supported with the issuance of distinctive UN/WFP fleet license plates. The memorandum of understanding between the government and WFP further compounds the establishment of WFP's global fleet hub in Uganda, a move slated to ease humanitarian response across Africa.

The milestone marks a strategic change for WFP's logistical network as Uganda is positioned to be the transport hub for regional distribution, stretching across East and Southern Africa.

"Often, quickly getting to the people in need involves crossing borders. Having these number plates facilitated by the government of Uganda is revolutionary. It will enable us to break through a lot of red tape, cross regional borders with the humanitarian supplies and gain those extra minutes and hours critical to saving lives," Marcus Prior, WFP's deputy country director for



One of the trucks being fitted with the digital license plate

Uganda, explains. Both Uganda and WFP are certified Authorised Economic Operators. The former is party to the EAC Authorised Economic Operator (AEO) programme adopted in respect to the World Customs Organisation's

SAFE Framework of Standards in 2006. The AEO status cushions trade facilitation and the security of supply chains. Under this, focus isn't on commodities, but the suppliers and the compliant are accorded the AEO

CROSSING BORDERS

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status. Low-risk suppliers can, therefore, be trusted by customs, attracting fewer controls and overcoming challenges like demurrage charges. But this isn't the only reason the country was chosen as the African logistics hub.

It's strategically positioned at both the northern and central transport corridors, which merge East Africa, to Somalia and DRC, thus linkages to Central Africa.

According to WFP, its fleet will expand as far as the regional need for humanitarian support necessitates. The distinctive number plates are set to offer the required recognition for seamless cross-border movement, free from non-tariff barriers as the humanitarian entity embarks on building alliances across the continent to deliver timely supplies beyond Burundi, DRC, Kenya, South Sudan and Ethiopia.

"It's the first of its kind. We didn't have legal provisions to produce number plates which are not country-specific. We changed our policies to accommodate this initiative, an excellent way to integrate countries," says Apollo Kashanku, the assistant commissioner of road transport, regulation and safety, at the transport ministry.

The Intelligent Transport Monitoring System, which has been contracted to handle the task at hand, reveals that the high-tech number plates embed the required digital information to ease customs processes.