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**The 2<sup>nd</sup> Meeting of the Continental Free Trade Area Negotiating Forum (CFTA-NF) kicks off in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**



**Addis Ababa, Ethiopia – 16 May, 2016** - The 2<sup>nd</sup> Meeting of the Continental Free Trade Area Negotiating Forum (CFTA-NF), kicked off today at the African Union Commission (AUC) Headquarters in Addis Ababa. During the next five days, Member States will consider all the post launch preparatory issues and essential process issues and technical documents that will enable the efficient conduct of the negotiations. The Meeting will specifically, among others, consider and adopt definitions of the Principles Guiding the CFTA Negotiations, and also discuss Approaches and Modalities for CFTA Negotiations.

The 25th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union, which was held in Johannesburg, South Africa in June 2015, launched the negotiations for the establishment of the Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA). The launch of the negotiations marked a major milestone in the implementation of the Summit decision to establish a continental free trade area by the Indicative date of 2017.

On behalf of H.E. the Commissioner for Trade and Industry, the Head of Trade Division, Mr. Nadir Merah recalled the achievements of the 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting of the CFTA Negotiating Forum and commended negotiators for the commitment to conclude CFTA Agreement by 2017. He informed the Negotiators that the Department of Trade and Industry is committed to providing technical and administrative support to the negotiations through the just established CFTA Support Unit. He emphasized that the principles guiding the CFTA negotiations should be defined in such a way that the CFTA will achieve the intended objectives. He stressed the importance of establishing the Technical Working Groups as well as agreeing on the CFTA Negotiating Forum Work Plan. Before concluding, Mr. Merah informed the Negotiators that a dedicated session to discussing modalities for the CFTA negotiations was planned on Friday which is the last day of the meeting.

The Chair of the meeting, Mr. Sayed Elbous, Senior Advisor to the Minister of Trade and Industry Ministry of the Republic of Egypt, welcomed the participants to the meeting and recalled the successful conclusion of the 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting of the CFTA Negotiating Forum held in February 2016. He emphasized the importance of the second meeting as key milestone towards the establishment of the Continental Free Trade Area.

The role of the African Union Commission in the negotiations is to provide and coordinate technical and administrative support to the Member States and REC's. The AUC also serves as the Secretariat to the CFTA Negotiating Forum. In playing its support and harmonization role, the AUC closely collaborates with the RECs, the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and the African Development Bank (AfDB) who are members of the Continental Task Force on the CFTA operating at the level of Chief Executive Officers and at the Technical level.



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