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From Barriers to Bridges: African Union Directors General of Customs discuss issues of implementing One-Stop Border Posts for improved Trade Facilitation



Harare, Republic of Zimbabwe – 18 November 2016. The 8th meeting of the African Union Sub-Committee of Directors General (AUSCDGs) of Customs came to a close today in Harare under the theme: “From Barriers to Bridges-Implementing One-Stop Border Posts for Improved Trade Facilitation.” The meeting was attended by Directors General from Member States, Representatives from Regional Economic Communities (RECs), World Customs Organization (WCO), African Development Bank (AfDB), United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and other Partners. The objectives of the meeting were to take stock of the work that has been carried out so far by Technical Working Groups and to endorse the recommendations of the experts and to reflect further on the issue of Implementing One-Stop Border Posts for improved Trade Facilitation in order to Boost Intra-African Trade.

In his opening remarks, the Acting Commissioner General of Zimbabwe Revenue Authority (ZIMRA), Mr. Happias Kuzvinzwa, recalled the theme of the meeting and admitted that it is in line with the current economic trends in Africa. He pointed out that borders by nature, divide countries and act as frontiers between countries. He mentioned that the theme places emphasis on the removal of barriers, borders and boundaries to form bridges that connect countries. The Ag. Commissioner emphasized that building bridges allows connectivity which he said, links people-to-people, eases border congestion, ensures smooth movement of both human and vehicle traffic across borders and in turn increases trade relations between nations. Mr. Kuzvinzwa also raised some of the challenges facing by Customs Administrations. He suggested that the establishment of Single Window Systems, coupled with One-Stop Border Posts, will go long way in promoting efficiency and reducing time and costs for traders. “Cross Border Cooperation is one of the solutions to come of the challenges that customs administrations face in the discharge of their mandates”, he underscored.

Also addressing the Meeting, the Secretary General of the World Customs Organization (WCO), Mr. Kumio Mikuriya thanked the Republic of Zimbabwe for the warm welcome and expressed the readiness of his Organization to assist and support the country’s initiatives launched in the framework of reform and modernization through human resources capacity building. Mr. Mikuriya stressed that the theme of the meeting fits with the WCO’s vision. He announced that the WCO will organize next year a Global Conference on Transit in order to support regional integration in Africa. He highlighted the importance of data collection, data exchange and data analysis and urged the meeting to share best practices and promised that the meeting’s outcomes will be incorporated to the WCO’s Capacity Building Programmes.

On behalf of Mrs. Fatima Haram Acyl, Commissioner for Trade and Industry of the AU Commission who had been called to other duties, Ambassador Lazarous Kapambwe welcomed all the participants to the 8th Meeting of the AU Sub-Committee of Directors General of Customs and thanked the Government and People of Zimbabwe for their hospitality. Referring to the theme of the Meeting, Amb. Kapambwe highlighted the importance of removing barriers to trade as a trade facilitation measure that would speed up the establishment of the Continental Free Trade Area which is one of the flagship projects of Agenda 2063. “Barriers were established because of fear of the neighbor. However, in a globalized world, countries need to open up but within a safe environment based on rules agreed upon by all. This is why the AU is spearheading negotiations for the basic rules that will guide the establishment of the Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) and enable us to move and trade within a conducive environment”, he stated. He recalled the pertinence of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement and urged Member States to accelerate its ratification and implementation for it could reduce the costs of trade by between 12.5 and 17.5 % amongst both developed and developing countries respectively. In this regard, he encouraged Member States to carry out the necessary trade facilitation measures that will ensure the tightening of all loopholes in order to attain the AU’s vision of doubling intra-African trade by 2022.

Representing the Minister of Finance and Economic Development of the Republic of Zimbabwe, Mr. Willard Manungo Permanent Secretary of the Ministry thanked the African Union Commission and the audience for the choice of Harare to host the meeting and welcomed all participants in Harare. He pointed out that corruption is one the major challenges confronting Customs Administrations worldwide. He urged African Revenue Administrations to share intelligence and notes on curbing corruption and all illegal and illicit activities such as smuggling, money laundering and tax evasion, among others. He concluded by encouraging the meeting to explore the possibility of establishing One-Stop Border Post at every border between African countries in order to speed up operations and ease travel and trade.

The conclusions of this 8th Meeting will be presented to the African Union Specialized Technical Committee on Trade, Industry and Mining, and the Specialized Technical Committee on Finance, Monetary Affairs, Economic Planning and Integration of the Union for further consideration and endorsement.



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