



United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa



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The Africa Trade Week 2016: Advancing Socio-Economic Structural Transformation through Intra-Africa Trade



Addis Ababa, Ethiopia – 28 November 2016 - The African Union Commission (AUC) is hosting, the First ever Africa Trade Week (ATW2016) from 28 November to 2 December 2016 under the theme: **“Advancing Socio-Economic Structural Transformation through Intra-Africa Trade”**. Convened by the African Union Commission in partnership with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the first ever Africa Trade Week (ATW2016) brings together Ministers of Trade, Finance and Transportation as well as other High-Level Government Officials, Heads of Africa’s Regional Economic Communities (RECs), a select group of CEOs and Executives from the Private Sector, Development Banks, and Senior Representatives from Civil Society, Academia, International Development Agencies and the Media. The objective of the event is to provide a comprehensive, integrated and inclusive platform for policy dialogue between these various constituencies.

The African Union (AU) has articulated, through Agenda 2063, a long-term framework for enhancing “an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the international arena.” The Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) was identified therein as the pillar for “accelerating progress towards continental unity and integration for sustained growth, trade, goods exchanges, services, free movement of people and capital. The CFTA is one of the flagship projects under the First Ten-Year Implementation Plan of the Agenda 2063.

In her opening remarks, the Commissioner for Trade and Industry of the African Union Commission, H.E. Mrs. Fatima Haram Acyl pointed out that the Continental Free Trade Area will help address many of Africa’s biggest challenges such as Youth Unemployment, Skills Development, Women’s Empowerment, Industrialization, Infrastructure Development and eventually, Africa’s Transformation. “The CFTA, once established, would bring together 54 African countries with a combined population of more than one billion and a combined gross domestic product of more than US\$3 trillion. It would establish a single continental market for goods and services, helping to turn 54 fragmented and individual African economies into a larger and more coherent market”, she emphasized. Commissioner Acyl qualified ATW2016 as an historic event and underlined that the purpose of having a whole week event is to encourage fruitful and stimulating dialogue among all stakeholders. She encouraged participants to be as interactive and engaging as possible. Before concluding, the Commissioner urged participants to talk to each other and come up with common solutions on how to move Africa’s trade agenda forward.

On behalf of Dr. Abdalla Hamdok, the Acting Executive Secretary of ECA, Dr. David Luke, Coordinator of the African Trade Policy Center (ATPC), indicated that the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa is delighted to partner with the AUC and others in organizing Africa Trade Week 2016. He explained that the ATW2016 was organized to ensure input and voice, especially in regard to the Africa Trade Forum (ATF). According to Dr. Luke, the ATF which will take place from 1-2 December 2016, will discuss among others, how trade can support gender equality and empowerment, perspectives from the RECs, and the CFTA Negotiations and related flanking measures. The Coordinator of the ATPC observed that the CFTA presents a critical opportunity for Africa’s Development. “Our research shows that a CFTA in goods alone, if complemented by action on trade facilitation would be expected to boost Africa’s GDP by 1 per cent, with every African country and region experiencing income gains”, he stressed. According to Dr. David Luke, the CFTA presents Africa with an opportunity that it simply has to seize. He called on participants to take advantage on the ATW2016 to discuss how to turn the CFTA to reality.

The Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), Mr. Mukhisa Kituyi described the general context in which the ATW2016 is being held after some recent and major political developments around the world. He encouraged participants to discuss more about Africa's integration. "Trade matters but it does not happen on its own. To benefit from trade, we need to consume what we produce. We need to add value to our products", he underscored. Finally, he urged participants to share their experiences in order to make the first ever Africa Trade Week a successful event.

The ATW2016 will conclude with an Africa Trade Forum (ATF) Session scheduled from 1-2 December 2016 which will explore ways to overcome the restrictions to trading and imports across Africa such as non-tariff barriers, quotas, embargoes and sanctions.

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