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Addis Ababa, Ethiopia P. O. Box 3243 Telephone: +251 11 551 7700 / +251 11 551 45 55/ Ext 1017 - Fax: +251 11 5511299

Website: www.au.int

Remarks at the Opening of the 3rd African Trade Ministers Meeting – Senior Officials session on Monday 30th September

By

Mrs. Treasure Thembesile Maphanga

Director of Trade and Industry

Distinguished representative of our host, the Ministry of Trade and Industry, Republic of South Africa

Distinguished representative of our partners, Ministry of Commerce and India, India

Distinguished representative of the Chair of the African Union and all member states represented at the meeting

Distinguished representatives of the Regional Economic Communities

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen, all protocol is observed.

It is my singular honour and pleasure to be present at the 3rd Meeting of Ministers of Trade from the AU and India, representing the Department of Trade and Industry of the African Union Commission under the leadership of H.E. Commissioner Fatima Acyl. Let me inform you that this meeting takes place in parallel with the India-Africa Business council which is coordinated by our colleagues in the department of economic affairs under the leader of His Excellency Commissioner Dr. Anthony Maruping. Indeed this event is one of the key partnership events on the calendar of the African Union Commission hence the high level participation that will be displayed at the Ministerial session tomorrow.

First of all let me thank our host, South Africa for the warm welcome and for making excellent arrangements for our meetings today and tomorrow. Let me also thank our co-chairs of the meeting the Government of Ethiopia and the Government of India for their leadership and guidance. We are pleased indeed with the level of participation on both sides and believe this is symbolic of the importance we all attach to this partnership which embraces all AU member states and India, roughly 2 billion people on the planet. When we look at the demographic trends, we will see that this poses both significant opportunities and challenges which makes the relevance of the meeting of Ministers of Trade even more timely.

This is our third meeting which is takes place in a symbolic year for the African Union Commission, where we have been celebrating the Golden Jubilee of the OAU/AU , taking the opportunity to engage citizens on the continent to a greater extent and to challenge ourselves to accelerate the African agenda of Prosperity, Integration and Peace, and to speak with one voice on the continent on critical issues that will make a difference to global peace, prosperity and sustainable development.

The agenda for our meeting is shaped by the need for a joint review and reflection on the emerging trends in trade, investment and their implication for our collaborative efforts to improve the quality of lives for our peoples. The meeting takes place at a time when the World Trade Organisation is planning its 9th Ministerial Conference in December this year, also, it takes place at a time where we see challenges for the multilateral trading system, the need to ensure that the interests of least developed countries and landlocked developing countries, the majority of whom are located in Africa, needs to be advocated for strongly. We realize that this forum is not a negotiating forum, however we are open to listen to the views of India and engage is a conversation as partners in development. We may not go into the details because we

have our policy formulation processes which exist which must be allowed to take their rightful place.

South- South Cooperation and the Post-2015 Development Agenda are an important context for this meeting. In June this year we held a Conference of Ministry of Industry in Nairobi on this theme and the topics covered were extremely interesting and relevant to our dialogue today. We will be able to share these key updates and messages in the context of our discussions during the next two days.

Our meeting takes place at a time where Africa has taken historic decisions in 2012, to establish a Continental Free Trade Area by the indicative date of 2017 and to double the level of intra-African trade from around 12% in 2012 to about 25% within a decade. This development will be a game changer for the continent and our trading partners because it will create a larger market, increase potential of economies of scale and enable us to insert ourselves at a continental more favourably into the global market.

We have also been moving forward with our plans to industrialise the continent, based on our natural resource endowments with the realization that market access and trade instruments are meaningless without the rise of our manufacturing capability, our competitiveness and most importantly our ability to create sustainable jobs for the youthful population on our continent. We have concrete frameworks and plans for Infrastructure development, with priorities that provide for public private partnership arrangements at regional and sub-regional levels. We have the Strategy for Industrialisation with priority sectors of Pharmaceuticals, Mineral Resources and its beneficiation as well as the Agribusiness sectors for food security. We have a comprehensive framework for Boosting Intra-African trade with seven cluster to address the critical drivers to enhance increased trade and in all of these we see great opportunities for our partnership with India.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

Finally, we look forward to exchanging views on how to enhance the modalities of coordination of our joint partnership ensuring that roles are clearer between the member states, the regional economic communities and the African Union Commission and NEPAD Agency.

I wish you fruitful deliberations and thank you for your kind attention.