The newly elected Secretary General of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Secretariat, H.E. Wamkele Mene swore in today as the first ever Secretary General (SG). The ceremony took place at the African Union Commission headquarters in the presence of H.E. Dr. Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the Commission and H.E Edward Xolisa Makaya, the Permanent Representative of South Africa to the African Union and Chairperson of the Permanent Representative Committee (PRC). The Ceremony was also attended by H.E. Mrs. Amma Adoma Twum-Amoah, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Ghana to the AU, representing the host country of the AfCFTA Secretariat and H.E. Mr. Zakario Maiga, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Niger, representing the Champion of the AfCFTA process.

The Secretary General will provide leadership and technical support to AfCFTA Secretariat and overall management of the day-to-day functioning of the Secretariat to ensure it achieves its desired mandate. In particular, he will be responsible for the management of the AfCFTA Secretariat, implementation of the AfCFTA Agreement and strategic collaboration; stakeholders’ engagement; and resources mobilization for the implementation of the AfCFTA Agreement.

While welcoming the Meeting, H.E. Edward Xolisa Makaya indicated that “the swearing in of the first Secretary General of the AfCFTA can only be linked to a day in 1993 when the late Peter Sutherland was elected as the first Director-General of the World Trade Organization.” He added “Mr. Mene is entrusted with a huge responsibility to lead one of the key institutions of the African Union and to guide Africa to realize the Aspiration number one of the Agenda 2063 which talks to the attainment of ‘A prosperous Africa based on inclusive Growth and Sustainable Development.’” H.E Xolisa Makaya, emphasized that the swearing in of the SG of the AfCFTA is a milestone...
in the journey to integrate the continent and an affirmation of Africa’s resolve to advance towards the realization of the objectives of the Abuja Treaty.”

“We put the AfCFTA Secretariat in very capable hands under Secretary General Mene, we are assured of effective implementation of the AfCFTA Agreement”, said H.E. Amb. Albert Muchanga, Commissioner for Trade and Industry.

The Chairperson of the Commission, H.E. Dr. Moussa Faki Mahamat congratulated the SG on his election and underscored the challenges ahead: “I congratulate you on your election. You have been elected on the basis of your experience and skill. The task that awaits you is quite gigantic but exhilarating because you will be working on the most emblematic project in the history of the African Union. The African Free Trade Zone is a necessity for Africa to strengthen its integration”.

In his acceptance speech, H.E Wamkele Mene, Secretary-General of the AfCFTA, pointed out the remarkable progressed that has been achieved largely because of the political will and commitment of the Assembly of Heads of States on providing leadership and ensuring that Africa takes concrete steps towards the creation of an integrated market.

The SG of AfCFTA paid tribute to the President of the Republic of Niger, H.E Mahamadou Issoufou, addressing him as the Champion of the AfCFTA and mentioning “his unwavering and dedicated leadership during the negotiation process of the AfCFTA since 2017.” The SG thanked the Chairperson of the Commission, H.E. Dr. Moussa Faki Mahamat, stating that through his leadership the negotiations were provided with all the necessary resource and political support. He also thanked H.E. Amb. Albert Muchanga, calling him ‘his dear senior brother’, and lauding his wisdom, strength and meaningful support during critical times. He expressed his gratitude to the former Commissioner H.E. Fatima Haram Acyl, stating that she provided strong foundation that was required in the early stages of AfCFTA negotiations.

Mr. Wamkele Mene underscored the importance of the Republic of Ghana, as the forefront of integration in Africa. “Ghana should be at the vanguard of our efforts.” “The AfCFTA is a critical response to Africa’s developmental challenges. It has the potential to enable Africa to significantly boost intra-Africa trade, improve economies of scale and to establish an integrated market.” He added “It also sends a strong signal to the international investor community that Africa is open for business, based on a single rule-book for trade and investment. “ The Secretary General took the opportunity to address the Coronavirus scourge, “Africa should not despair and fall into despondency-from a trade perspective, we should see this crisis as an opportunity – through the AfCFTA we have an opportunity to reconfigure our supply chains, to reduce reliance on others and to expedite the establishment of regional value chains that will boost intra-Africa trade”.

Before he concluded, the SG indicated that the implementation phase of the AfCFTA coincides with the year of silencing the Guns, providing an opportunity to focus on fast-
tracking Africa’s economic development objectives. “Successful implementation of the AfCFTA shall further consolidate the gains that are foreseen in Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want and indeed shall take us a step closer to the Africa we want”, he stated.

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