

Press Release N°431-/2016**The African Union Commission enables sharing of best practices among Customs Experts from East and Southern Africa on Trade Facilitation measures**

Antananarivo, Madagascar – 21 December 2016. The African Union Commission, in collaboration with the World Customs Organization Regional Office for Capacity Building (WCO-ROCB) in East and Southern Africa (ESA) organized the First Regional Forum on Trade Facilitation for the ESA Region on 21 and 22 December 2016 in Antananarivo. The objective of the Forum was to assess the implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement and identify challenges that vary from country to country. It also aims at sharing best practices and encouraging a regional approach in the implementation of trade facilitation measures.

The Forum takes into account the first aspiration of the 10-year plan of Agenda 2063 whose objective is to see "A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development". With this in mind, the Forum focused on Africa's Regional Integration Program to boost Intra-African Trade and the establishment of the Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) by the indicative date of 2017.

On behalf of the Director of WCO-ROCB, Mr. Andrew Odhiambo, Representative of the WCO ROCB- ESA, thanked the people and Government of Madagascar for accepting to host the Forum, and the AUC for continuing to support its Member States in the implementation of the Trade Facilitation agenda. He reiterated the commitment of the WCO to facilitate the implementation of the Agreement. He recalled that trade facilitation is the best avenue to increase intra-African trade and concluded by urging Member States to ratify the Agreement.

In his introductory remarks, Mr. Aly Iboura Moussa, Acting Director and Head of Customs Division of the Department of Trade and Industry of the AU Commission first of all expressed the gratitude of the AU Commission to the Government and people of Madagascar for having graciously agreed to host this Forum in the city of Antananarivo. He seized the opportunity to convey the greetings of Her Excellencies the Chairperson of the AU Commission and the Commissioner for Trade and Industry to the Malagasy people. Mr. Iboura Moussa indicated that statistics show that intra-African trade is far behind trade within other continents and that to address the situation, Heads of State and Government of the African Union endorsed a Plan of Action on Boosting intra-African Trade (BIAT) whose objective is to double intra-African trade by 2022. He concluded by informing participants that Africa firmly supports the implementation of the Trade Facilitation Agreement signed in Bali, Indonesia in 2013 and that it would be Important to align it with the BIAT and other similar programmes at national and regional levels.

The Director General of Madagascar Customs, Mr. Eric Rabenda, pointed out that since the adoption of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement in Bali, a number of initiatives have been taken to optimize its implementation. In this regard, he called for the development of a common strategy for Africa, particularly, the ESA Region, that would increase transparency and predictability in customs procedures, enable businesses to integrate global value chains and secure revenue collection. Mr. Rabenda recalled a study by World Trade Organization (WTO) that indicates that trade facilitation measures can decrease the cost of doing business by 14.5 per cent on average. He underscored the benefits of Regional Integration for Intra-African Trade while working towards removing non-tariff barriers. In conclusion, he called for fruitful sharing of experiences, strategic positioning of the region in trade facilitation and above all concrete commitments.



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