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Press Release

The First Meeting of the Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) Technical Working Groups (TWGs) discusses Technical issues related to the CFTA



Kigali, Rwanda – 06 February 2017. The African Union Commission organized the First Meeting of the Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) Technical Working Groups from 6 to 17 February 2017 in Kigali. The objectives of the Meeting were amongst others, to provide the experts with a background of the CFTA and enable an appreciation of the groundwork covered so far. It was to provide an understanding of the approved terms of reference so that the Technical Working Groups appreciate the nature and breadth of their assignments. It was also to provide the experts with an overview of the draft legal text and appendices which will be used as inputs to the negotiations. The meeting was attended by relevant experts, in the technical areas as determined by each African Union Member States together with the relevant experts

from the Regional Economic Communities (RECs), other members of the Continental Task Force (CTF) and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

The Meeting 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 Meeting focused on fast-tracking the establishment of the Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) by the indicative date of 2017. In so doing, the Technical Working Groups (TWGs) focused attention to Trade in Services (TIS), Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs) and Technical Barriers to Trade (TBTs), Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Measures, Rules of Origin (RoO), Legal and Institutional Affairs, Trade Remedies, and Customs Procedures and Trade Facilitation.

In his introductory remarks on behalf of Mrs. Treasure Thembisile Maphanga, Director for Trade and Industry of the African Union Commission, Mr. Nadir Merah, Head of Trade Division, expressed the gratitude of the AU Commission to the Government and People of Rwanda for hosting this Meeting. He underscored the importance of the Technical Working Groups' work during the two weeks and mentioned that the outcomes of the Meeting will allow the negotiating institutions recognized by the Rules of Procedures for CFTA Negotiations, i.e. the Negotiating Forum, the Senior Trade Officials, and African Trade Ministers to reach consensus and have a smooth landing zone. Mr. Nadir pointed out that one of the most important areas of Goods negotiations is Customs issues. "The CFTA will involve an increase in the movement of Goods across borders. Indeed one of the objectives is to boost Intra-African Trade. To achieve this, there will be need to ensure that the divergent national customs laws are harmonized and the procedures simplified together with effective cooperation by Customs administrations", he highlighted. The Head of Trade Division also emphasized the importance of Services as he mentioned that Services sector contribute on average around 50% of GDP for many African countries economies. He noted that to facilitate the conclusion of the CFTA negotiations by 2017, the African Union Commission developed a draft CFTA Model Text on both Trade in Goods and Trade in Services as instructed by the Heads of State and Government's Assembly in July 2016. He informed the Meeting that the draft text was considered by the RECs and members of the Continental Task Force on the CFTA last month. He concluded by thanking cooperating partners for their continued support for the CFTA process and wished fruitful deliberations to the Meeting.

The Director General for Trade and investment of the Ministry of Trade and Industry of Rwanda, Mr. Robert Opirah stressed that Rwanda was highly privileged to host this 1st round of the Technical Working Groups to discuss the opportunities for enhancing Intra-African Trade and Industrialization as part of the Continental Free Trade Area. Mr. Opirah recalled the objectives and advantages of the CFTA and pointed out that the CFTA is a good platform for creating greater synergy and partnerships for the business communities of all the countries. He urged and encouraged all chief negotiators present to try to build consensus in all matters of the negotiations and keep the spirit of partnership which, he said, will address some of the constraints Africa is facing in order to increase Intra-Africa Trade and advance the Africa competitive agenda. In conclusion, he called for fruitful sharing of experiences and emphasized

that it is these noble aspirations of increased market access within Africa's own region that the CTFA negotiations should strive to achieve.



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