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Press release

The African Union Commission hosts the 5th Meeting of the Continental Free Trade Area Negotiating Forum (CFTA-NF)



Addis Ababa, Ethiopia – 27 February 2017 - The African Union Commission (AUC) is hosting the 5th Meeting of the Continental Free Trade Area Negotiating Forum (CFTA-NF) from 27 February - 04 March 2017. The meeting is preceded by an Orientation workshop (27 – 28 February 2017) to provide the CFTA negotiators with the results of the requested studies on the modalities in previous deliberations. This will accordingly equip the negotiators to consider and finalize the draft modalities for Negotiations on both Tariff and Services. The workshop will lead to the CFTA-NF whose agenda includes considerations of the Modalities. The meeting is being attended by Senior Trade Officials from Member States and Trade Experts from the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and other members of the Continental Task Force such as UNECA, UNCTAD and AfDB.

To meet the Agenda 2063's aspirations such as: "A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development" and " An Africa, whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children", the establishment of CFTA by the indicative date of 2017 is imperative.

In her opening remarks, the Commissioner for Trade and Industry, H.E. Mrs. Fatima Haram Acyl expressed her appreciation for the commitment and dedication that Member States have demonstrated for the process of establishing the Continental Free Trade Area. She indicated that the CFTA presents significant welfare gains, output and employment expansion, and intra-African trade growth in the long-run. She highlighted the fact that substantive progress has been made to ensure that the CFTA is made a reality by end of 2017. "I am very confident that the end of 2017 will usher Africa into a new era where our traditional borders will become less important as a result of establishment of the Continental Free Trade Area", she emphasized. The Commissioner recalled that in the last four meetings of the CFTA Negotiating Forum, negotiators have been able to adopt the Rules of Procedure (RoP) as well as Definitions of the CFTA negotiations guiding principles that were subsequently approved by the African Union Ministers for Trade in May 2016. She also recalled the establishment of the Seven (7) Technical Working Groups (TWGs) and the first meeting of all the Technical Working Groups (TWGs) that took place in Kigali, from 6th – 17th February 2017. Commissioner Acyl reminded participants that the Commission has developed a preliminary draft of CFTA Model Text on both trade in goods and trade in services as directed by the Heads of State in July 2016. According to her, the draft text has been validated by the RECs and members of the Continental Task Force on the CFTA in January 2017 and sent to Member States and RECs for national and regional consultations. "For the CFTA to be successful, it is very important to recall that ownership is very critical. We are trying our best to engage stakeholders in this process including the Private Sector and other Non-State Actors where possible. However, we always encourage and urge Member States and Regional Economic Communities to undertake regional and national consultations of those stakeholders as regularly as possible", she underscored. She concluded by recognizing the critical role that Regional Economic Communities and Technical Partners as well as members of the Continental Task Force have played in providing technical assistance to the CFTA process. She appreciated the role played by UNECA (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa) and UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development) in providing technical and analytical studies that have contributed to achievements registered so far.



Mr. Sayed El Bous, Egypt's Chief Trade Negotiator and Chairperson of the Meeting, expressed his gratitude and congratulations to the Commissioner as she is now leaving the Commission after years of commitment and dedication to the CFTA. He appreciated the Department of Trade and Industry for convening the 5th CFTA Negotiating Forum and by providing working documents ahead of schedule. He recalled the objectives of the meeting and urged participants to come up with concrete proposals and outcomes in order to move the agenda forward and meet the deadline of the CFTA completion by the indicative date of 2017.

The 5th Meeting of the Continental Free Trade Area Negotiating Forum will kick off from 1-4 March 2017 and will be adopting the modalities that will guide the negotiations in Tariff liberalization and Trade in Services liberalization following a two-day Capacity Building Workshop for Negotiators.



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