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The 8th Meeting of the Continental Task Force (CTF) Discusses Strategies to Fast-track the Establishment of the Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA)

Arusha, Tanzania – 27 March 2017. The 8th Meeting of the Continental Task Force (CTF) on the Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA), commenced today in Arusha, Tanzania. The meeting is organized by the Department of Trade and Industry of the African Union Commission. The objective of the Meeting is to review the status of implementation of previous decisions made by the Continental Task Force and consider recommendations of the CFTA Negotiating Institutions. The Meeting will also review draft agendas and documentation for the 2nd Meeting of Technical Working Groups (TWG) on the CFTA, planned to take place in Nairobi from 24 April – 6th May 2017, and the 6th Meeting of the CFTA Negotiating Forum, scheduled to take place in Addis Ababa from 5th-10th June 2017. The Meeting is attended by experts from the African Union Commission, the Regional Economic Communities (RECs), the African Development Bank (AfDB), The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA).



In his opening remarks, Mr. Prudence Sebahizi, Chief Technical Advisor on the CFTA, on behalf of Mrs. Treasure Maphanga, Director of Trade and Industry of the African Union Commission, expressed his gratitude to the Task Force for the progress made so far with regards to the CFTA negotiations. The Head of the CFTA Unit pointed out that the meeting is taking place following completion of a number of studies requested by Member States. He deplored the fact that the works on modalities for both Trade tariff liberalization and Trade in Services negotiations remain so far uncompleted. Mr. Sebahizi recalled and highlighted outcomes of the meetings of the CFTA Negotiating Forum as well as the first Meeting of Technical Working Group on the CFTA. He encouraged the Continental Task Force to work as a team to ensure that the negotiations are effectively concluded by 2017.

The Chief Technical Advisor recalled that the next Summit in July 2017 will follow up on the Decision of the 28th Summit on CFTA (Assembly/AU/Dec.623 (XXVIII)). He informed the Meeting that H.E. Mahamadou Issoufou, President of the Republic of Niger, was mandated to champion the process of the CFTA to ensure that the deadline of the end of 2017 is met and report on measures taken to the next ordinary session of the Assembly in July 2017. "This position by the Heads of States and Governments does not leave us with any room to delay work on the substance of the CFTA Agreement. Remember that we have made promises, during our last meeting in Nairobi, that conclusion of the CFTA by end of 2017 is technical possible. Indeed it is POSSIBLE! We therefore have a duty to do all that we can do and place the ball in the court of the Member States", he recommended.

The Head of the CFTA Unit also appealed to the RECs to share their 2017 Work Plans with the AUC for better coordination. According to him, doing so, will help reduce clashing of meetings. He stressed the importance of the AUC Team to participate in relevant RECs' meetings as much as RECs do in the Continental Task Force, CFTA negotiations and other engagements. "AUC involvement in RECs activities will give us an opportunity to understand the Member States better and learn from best practices of RECs", he emphasized. Before he concluded, Mr. Sebahizi emphasized that, consultation between the RECs and Member States is an essential component of ensuring ownership of the draft and ultimately the final CFTA Agreement. "I appeal to the RECs to spur the necessary consultation, and where appropriate, the technical work at the Member State level in order to have as informed decision making at the Technical Working Group and CFTA Negotiating Forum levels as possible as the text of the agreement develops", he said.

The CFTA Continental Task Force (CTF) is established by the African Union Assembly to coordinate actions between the African Union Commission and the Regional Economic Communities and to ensure that the CFTA negotiations are conducted within the agreed timelines.



For further information, please contact **Mr. Prudence Sebahizi – Head of the CFTA Unit** - **Email:** SebahiziP@africa-union.org

Media contacts:

Patient Atcho, Department of Trade and Industry – Tel: + 251 929335250 - Email: atchop@africa-union.org and **Esther Azaa Tankou**, Directorate of Information and Communication, AUC Tel. +251 911361185, E-mail: yamboue@africa-union.org

For further information: Directorate of Information and Communication | African Union Commission | E-mail: DIC@african-union.org | Web Site: www.au.int | Addis Ababa | Ethiopia

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