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Press Release

President Issoufou Mahamadou calls upon African Union Ministers of Trade to stick to the deadline establishing of the Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA)



Niamey, Niger – 15 June 2017. The African Union Commission in collaboration with the Government of Niger organized the third Meeting of African Union Ministers of Trade from 15-16 June 2017 in Niamey. The objective of the Meeting is to consider the report of the 3rd Meeting of Senior Trade Officials as well as the outcomes of the 6th Meeting of the Continental Free Trade Area Negotiating Forum (CFTA-NF). The meeting is being attended by Ministers for Trade and delegates from each African Union Member States together with the relevant experts from the Regional Economic Communities (RECs), representatives from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), the African Trade Policy Centre (ATPC) and the African Development Bank (AfDB).

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 2017.

In his introductory remarks, Amb. Albert M. Muchanga, Commissioner for Trade and Industry of the African Union Commission, expressed his appreciation to the President of Niger, H.E. Issoufou Mahamadou for having offered as Champion of the CFTA process, to host the Meetings of the CFTA Negotiations. Commissioner Muchanga summarized the expected outputs from the Meeting underscored that the establishment of the CFTA is a member states driven process and reaffirmed the African Union Commission's commitment to facilitating the work of the Member States. He recommended Honorable Ministers to liaise with their respective Foreign Ministers to be part of national delegations to the July 2017 Summit of the African Union so that they can provide appropriate policy advice to their respective Heads of State and Government when they receive and consider the report of the CFTA's Champion on 4th July 2017. The Commissioner for Trade and Industry pointed out that "The CFTA brings to life the ideal of Pan Africanism. Through it, our small and fragmented markets are integrated to create a large market", he emphasized. Before he concluded, Commissioner Muchanga urged Member States to sensitize the Private Sector, Labour Movements, Citizens, Legislators and other Stakeholders on the contents of the final draft of the legal text and annexes as the establishment of the CFTA, by the end of the year, would be the first significant milestone of the Agenda 2063.



While addressing the Meeting, H.E. Issoufou Mahamadou, the President of Niger and Champion of the CFTA, pointed out that the establishment of the Continental Free Trade Area will attract investments from both Africa and the world at large and create employment opportunities for our young people. “Assured of a better life at home, our young people will not take the risks of the dangerous migration to Europe or elsewhere. This therefore means we must work tirelessly to make the CFTA a reality”, he emphasized. The President recalled the work that has already been undertaken by the Technical Work Groups, the Negotiating Forum and the Continental Task Force and Commended Technical Experts for the preparation and discussion of the advanced stage of the draft Agreement Establishing the Continental Free Trade Area. According to the Champion of the CFTA Process, Negotiations are about “give” and “take”. With that spirit, he expressed his confidence that the draft Agreement Establishing the Continental Free Trade Area can be delivered by the stipulated deadline. “While my task is to prod you to move with speed while producing tangible and substantive progress, as I am doing now, your task is also to push the Technical Working Groups and the Negotiating Forum to move with speed and produce tangible results. Let us not lose the momentum that we have built” he encouraged.

President Mahamadou underscored the issue of Rules of Origins and indicated that they should be kept as simple as possible to enable Africa to compete with the rest of the world. Before he concluded, the Champion of the CFTA Process urged African Union Ministers of Trade to adopt adequate flanking measures and flexibilities within their national and sub-regional contexts that would ensure that the burdens and benefits associated with the Continental Free Trade Area are distributed more equitably among all the African Union Member States. “One of the eventual outcomes of the CFTA should be to improve social structures, and bind us closer together in bonds of amity and solidarity within our respective communities as well as among the broader African Community”, he concluded.

The Meeting was chaired by the Nigerian Honorable Minister of State for Industry, Trade and Investment, Mrs. Aisha Abubakar. The Minister of Trade and Industry of South Africa delivered the vote of thanks on behalf of the Ministers of Trade and appreciated the hospitality accorded to all delegations and committed to the Champion in fulfilling his mandate.



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