



**Statement by Ambassador Albert M. Muchanga,  
African Union Commissioner for Trade and Industry**

**Delivered at the Opening Session of the  
Retreat of the African Group of Ambassadors in  
Geneva,**

**Grand Hôtel Kempinski**

**Geneva, 6<sup>th</sup>  
July 2017**

**The Dean of the African Group,  
Your Excellencies Ambassadors,  
Distinguished Retreat Participants,  
Ladies and Gentlemen.**

It is my greatest pleasure to be with Your Excellencies here today.

This is my first official visit to Geneva since my assumption of duty as African Union Commissioner for Trade and Industry.

The visit accords me the initial opportunity for me to engage with your good selves: the voices, eyes, ears and fingertips of African Governments in Geneva, a strategic diplomatic centre.

You are on the frontline of Africa's trade diplomacy with the rest of the world, especially within the context of the World Trade Organization (WTO), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the International Trade Centre (ITC).

The African Union Commission, led by the Chairman, His Excellency Moussa Faki Mahamat admires and fully supports your work.

You do Africa proud by speaking with one voice, thereby presenting a common front in Africa's multilateral engagements and negotiations with the rest of the world.

The recently ended Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union reaffirmed commitment to Africa speaking with one voice and acting in unison in the international system.

Through the Continental Trade Area (CFTA) Process, we are also establishing one Africa with one market.

Before I go any further, let me earnestly thank you for securing the vote for Dr. Tedros Adhanom Gebreyesus as the new Director General of the World Health Organization.

During the just ended Assembly and before it, the Executive Council, Africa as a collective congratulated this eminent son of Africa.

I plan to pay a courtesy call on him. The success is a key indicator that Africa wins when she speaks with one voice and acts in unison.

Keep up the good work.

**The Dean,  
Your Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I believe that this will be the first Retreat of the African Group of Ambassadors since Morocco's re-admission to the African Union. This is a good development for the Continent.

As you deliberate on the agenda for your Retreat, it is my hope and expectation that you will come up with fresh ideas and initiatives on how to resolve the long standing issue of the Observer status of the African Union in the WTO. As we establish the Continental Free Trade Area, by December this year, the Observer status of the African Union in the WTO will become more pressing.

With that status in the WTO, the African Union Commission will be better placed to provide more effective facilitation and coordination to this distinguished Group of Ambassadors.

I would like to suggest that Your Excellencies consider setting up a small ad-hoc committee of Ambassadors and Heads of Mission, to engage with our interlocutors in the WTO, with a view to securing the Observer status of the African Union in the WTO as a matter of urgency.

The Specialized Technical Committee of Ministers of Trade, Industry and Mining will be meeting in Addis Ababa this coming October and I am expected to provide feedback on the state of play on the African Union getting Observer status in the WTO.

**The Dean,  
Your Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen.**

May I now share with Your Excellencies, the progress attained so far in the CFTA negotiations, which is the number one priority deliverable of the portfolio of Trade and Industry.

The CFTA is Africa's own trade agenda. His Excellency, President Mahamadou Issoufou of Niger and Champion of the CFTA Process, hosted meetings of the CFTA Negotiating Forum, Senior

Trade Officials and African Union Ministers of Trade from 5<sup>th</sup> -16<sup>th</sup> June, 2017 in Niamey, Niger.

I am happy to state that the meetings were successful with important outcomes in a number of key areas.

The African Union Ministers of Trade were able to agree on modalities for the liberalization of intra-African trade in goods and services.

The trade in good modalities will determine the overall ambition as well as the speed with which our countries will eliminate the tariffs and other taxes currently applicable to the products, which we import from each other.

The Ministers agreed on an ambitious target of 90 percent for liberalization of tariff lines, which takes into account the overall goal of establishing an integrated market on the Continent.

At the same time, the Trade modalities provide sufficient flexibilities and length of time for member states to adjust and implement the significant commitments they will be undertaking under the CFTA.

It is also pertinent to point out that seven of our member states expressed a level of ambition of 85%. The Assembly mandated the Champion to engage with the Heads of State and Government of those countries with a view to achieving overall consensus in a spirit of pan Africanism.

In addition, the Ministers were also able to adopt modalities on trade in services liberalization that provide a basis for the liberalization of trade in the services sector among the CFTA member states, as well as a basis for future regulatory cooperation, in line with their agreed commitments.

Once again, the modalities attempt to provide for adequate flexibilities that will be applicable to the different countries, given their different levels of development.

In addition to this, Ministers also considered and adopted a road map and schedule to enable us conclude the negotiations in December this year, in line with the decision of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union. The Assembly endorsed this position by reaffirming commitment to conclude negotiations by this December.

So far, the CFTA negotiations are moving in the right direction and at the desired pace. We are confident of establishing a commercially viable CFTA by December this year.

**The Dean,**

**Your Excellencies,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

African countries face critical challenges as the date for the 11<sup>th</sup> WTO Ministerial Conference (MC-11), scheduled to take place in Buenos Aires in December this year approaches.

The Buenos Aires Ministerial meeting stands as another important milestone in our journey to ensure development friendly outcomes from the multilateral trading system. The African Ministers of Trade, rely on Your Excellencies to articulate positions for Africa for the adoption by the African Ministers, on the critical issues that will be before the MC-11.

This Retreat is an important forum to enable us reach agreement and a common position among ourselves, before our engagement with the rest of the WTO members. Your insights will feed into the extra-ordinary meeting of African Union Ministers of Trade which



will soon be convening to adopt a common African position for MC-11.

**The Dean,  
Your Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen.**

Before I conclude, let me say a few words on the theme of the policy debate: **“Africa Agenda 2063: Industrialization and Structural Transformation”**

At their Assembly held in May 2013 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; the African Union Heads of State and Government, during their 50th Celebration Anniversary of the Organization of African issued a Solemn Declaration that came up with the: **African Union Agenda 2063: A Shared Strategic Framework for Inclusive Growth and Sustainable Development.**

Agenda 2063 is a roadmap for the sustainable development of the African continent in years 2013-2063. It has a common reporting template with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2015-2030.

Based on extensive consultations with stakeholders across the width and breadth of the Continent, including women and youth who are the majority of the citizens of Africa, Agenda 2063 embodies the *Africa we want building upon the Africa we have*. We are hence using our history and present to imagine a better Africa for present and future generations of Africans.

In a move aimed at ensuring the realization of Agenda 2063, the African Union Commission coordinated the preparation of the First 10-Year Implementation Plan for this grand vision.

As part of this 10 year implementation plan, key flagship projects have been identified and approved by the African Union Policy Organs. The flagship projects include: the Integrated high speed train network; the African Passport; the African Union Commodities strategy; fast tracking the establishment of the Continental Free Trade Area by 2017; establishment of a single African air transport market; e-university and Silencing the Guns by 2020 among others.

The overarching aim of the AU Agenda 2063 is the structural transformation of the economies of the continent. In this era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, Your Excellencies are well placed to

advise us on how Africa can approach her industrialization and adjustment to digital trade.

Let me at this stage state that the just ended Assembly appointed His Excellency the President of Kenya as Champion of Africa's transition to the digital economy. As African Union Commission, we shall work closely with Your Excellencies in assisting the Digital Economy Champion to develop a forward looking agenda on this issue of critical importance in the attainment of the goals of African Union Agenda 2063.

**The Dean,  
Your Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen.**

Let end by thanking you for your kind attention.

Let me also thank you for your extraordinary efforts to make the voice of Africa be heard and listened to in the policy organs of the WTO.

Thank you, thank you very much and I wish you fruitful deliberations.