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Press Release

African Union Member States meet for the last round of the Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) Negotiations



Abuja, Federal Republic of Nigeria – 6 November 2017. The Department of Trade and Industry of the African Union Commission is organizing the fourth Meeting of the Technical Working Groups (TWGs) of the Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) from 6-17 November 2017. The objective of the meeting is to consider the draft Texts of the CFTA Agreement, its Protocols and its Annexes. The Meeting is being attended by Chief Negotiators and Trade experts from AU Member States, Trade Experts from the eight Regional Economic Communities (RECs) recognised by the AU (CEN-SAD, COMESA, EAC, ECCAS, ECOWAS, IGAD, SADC and UMA), Members of the CFTA Continental Task Force (CTF), African Development Bank (AfDB), United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

While welcoming participants, Mr. Edet Sunday Akpan, Permanent Secretary at the Federal Ministry of Industry, Trade and Investment of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, pointed out that the CFTA is a priority agenda for the African Union Assembly. “It is of vital importance to continue to keep in mind that the CFTA is a significant mandate to the African Union Summit. It is the hope of the leaders that significant achievements are recorded in the near future”, he said. He reminded the Meeting that the timeline for concluding the CFTA is next month and he quoted H.E. Muhammadu Buhari, President of Federal Republic of Nigeria supporting the establishment of the CFTA while

addressing his D-8 Summit counterparts last month in Turkey: “In Africa, we are on the threshold of finalizing negotiations to establish the first ever Single Market for Trade in Goods and Services on our Continent, in the Continental Free Trade Area for Africa. This will be a win-win for all, including member countries of the D-8”. The Permanent Secretary also highlighted the advantages of the establishment of the CFTA and urged participants to do all that is required to be done to finalize their work as the Technical Working Groups. “I am confident that you are up to the task”, he concluded.

In her opening remarks on behalf of the Commissioner for Trade and Industry, H.E. Amb. Albert M. Muchanga, Mrs. Treasure Thembisile Maphanga, Director for Trade and Industry of the African Union Commission thanked the Government and the people of the Federal Republic of Nigeria for their hospitality and their outstanding generosity. She recalled the achievements of the last Session of the CFTA Negotiating Forum in Addis Ababa, in October 2017 and expressed her appreciation for the commitment of the Member States in moving the CFTA forward. “We have witnessed the CFTA Chief Negotiators confirming their commitment to conclude the CFTA Agreement by end of 2017. They have clearly outlined the benefits that will accrue from the establishment of the CFTA”, she underscored. She announced that African Union Ministers of Trade are expected to meet in Niamey, Niger from 1st – 2nd 2017 to consider the Draft Texts on the Agreement Establishing the CFTA, Protocols and annexes. The Director for Trade and Industry acknowledged that the assignment ahead of the participants is very critical to the conclusion of the CFTA Negotiations by end of this year. Mrs Maphanga indicated that the Draft Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area should be ready by end of this month together with three protocols namely the Protocol on Trade in Services, the Protocol on Trade in Goods and the Protocol on Dispute Settlement Mechanism. According to her, the Protocol on Trade in Services will have two Annexes, namely, Schedules of Commitments and Regulatory Frameworks. And the Protocol on Trade in Goods will have the following Annexes:

- Tariff Liberalization Schedules;
- Rules of Origin;
- Customs Procedures and Cooperation;
- Trade Facilitation;
- Transit and Transit Facilitation;
- Non-Tariff Barriers;
- Technical Barriers to Trade;
- Sanitary and phytosanitary Measures; and
- Trade Remedies.

Before she concluded, Mrs. Treasure Maphanga emphasized that the journey before Member States is to create One Africa with One Market and One Strong Voice, in line with the AU Agenda 2063’s vision of “an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in global arena”. “We owe it to ourselves and future generations to create an integrated market that expands opportunity for our socio-economic progress”, she concluded.

In his opening remarks, Amb. Chiedu Osakwe, Nigerian Chief Trade Negotiator and Director-General of Nigerian Office for Trade Negotiations (NOTN) paid tribute to the African Union Commission (AUC) under, he said, the competent and able leadership of Ambassador Albert M. Muchanga, Commissioner for Trade and Industry. “The AUC is working hard and providing technical leadership in partnership with the Regional Economic Communities (RECs), UNECA, UNCTAD and a number of other institutions are at work to complete the construction of our Single Market. So, our gratitude to the AUC and all our partners” he acknowledged. He pointed out that the Continent’s best chance to address the dual pressure of the dramatic increases in Africa’s population and associated unemployment pressures, is to create the Single Market for Trade in Goods and Services on the legal and policy framework of the African Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA). “On the basis of the CFTA Africa can grow intra-African trade, expand investments, modernize our economies, integrate our businesses into regional and global supply chains and hence (create) more jobs for Africans” he underlined. He went on and quoted Professor Yemi Osinbajo, Vice-President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria who opened last week the High-Level Forum on Trade and Investment Facilitation for Development, and reaffirmed the core position that: “On the CFTA, there is no plan B for us. We absolutely must succeed!” “The final stretch is always the hardest part. I am confident that we shall get it done. The stakes in the CFTA are very high and it is a win-win for all our countries”, he concluded.

The 8th Meeting of the Continental Free Trade Area Negotiating Forum (CFTA-NF) will kick off from 20 – 25 November, 2017 in Abuja, Nigeria to undertake negotiations on the text of the Agreement Establishing the CFTA, undertake negotiations on the Protocols on Trade in Goods, complete negotiations on the Protocol on Trade in Services, and conclude work on several Annexes..



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