



## Press Release

## The African Union Sub-Committee of Directors General of Customs Express Commitment to Combat Corruption in Customs to effectively implement the AfCFTA

**Moroni, Comoros – 21 September 2018.** The Department of Trade and Industry of the African Union Commission organized in partnership with Comoros Customs, the 10<sup>th</sup> African Union Sub-Committee of Directors General of Customs Meeting from 17-21 September 2018 in Moroni under the theme: ***“Combating Corruption in Customs to effectively implement the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)”***. The objective of the Meeting was to take stock of the work carried out by the various Customs Technical Working Groups (TWGs)



since the 9<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session of the AU Directors General of Customs was held in Yaoundé, Cameroon in November 2017. The Directors General were also expected to consider the recommendations of the Experts and reflect further on the theme of the Meeting.

The Meeting was attended by Directors General of Customs from AU Member States, Customs Experts from the Regional Economic Communities (RECs), Experts from the United Nations of Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the Secretary General of the World Customs Organization (WCO) and the WCO Regional Offices for Capacity Building for Eastern and Southern Africa and for West and Central Africa. The Closing Ceremony of the Meeting was graced by the presence of H.E. Mr. Azali Assoumani, President of the Republic of Comoros, who took off some time from his busy schedule to meet with the participants.

While welcoming participants, Mr. Bianrifi Tharmidhi, Minister of Economy and Investments of the Government of the Union of Comoros, indicated that his country was privileged to host the 10<sup>th</sup> Edition of the African Union Sub-Committee of Directors

General of Customs Meeting. Mr. Tharmidhi expressed his gratitude to the African Union Commission for the choice of Comoros to host such an important high level Meeting. He recalled the theme of the Meeting and commended Experts for their great work aiming to stamp out corruption in Customs administrations within the Continent. The Honourable Minister indicated that his country fully supports the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and expressed the commitment of Comoros to ratify the Agreement by October this year. He urged Directors General of customs to find pathways to solutions that adequately will help combat Corruption in Customs and meet the needs of Integration of the people of Africa.

Addressing the Meeting, the Secretary General of the World Customs Organization (WCO), Dr. Kunio Mikuriya expressed his gratitude to the Comoros Authorities for their hospitality, the warm welcome and the political will symbolized by the presence of the President and two honourable Ministers at the Meeting, namely the Minister of Economy and Investments and the Minister of Finance and Budget. He indicated that the WCO is fully supportive of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) which he said, will boost the Intra-African Trade and promote trade through Trade Facilitation and the improvement of customs procedures. "We are working with African Union Member States in order to develop a harmonized digital system that will create cooperation between Customs Administrations across the Continent", he underscored. Dr. Mikuriya also pointed out that tackling illicit trade through risk management is key in Boosting Intra-African Trade and mainstream African economies into the global system. In this respect, he mentioned that the use of digitization to analyse data would support African Union Member States and the Regional Economic Communities to fight illicit trade. Before he concluded, the Secretary General of the WCO insisted on the fact that Trade Facilitation is critical to combat financial flows, terrorism and fraud.



In his opening remarks, the Commissioner for Trade and Industry of the African Union Commission, H.E. Amb. Albert M. Muchanga appreciated the warmth and the hospitality of the Government and the People of Comoros. He congratulated the incoming bureau of

the AU Sub-Committee of the Directors General of Customs under the Leadership of Mr. Kamalidini Souef, Director General of Comoros Customs and expressed his gratitude to the out-going bureau for the work they did during their tenure of office.

Recalling the theme of the Meeting, Commissioner Muchanga indicated that it is both timely and relevant. "It is timely because we have made significant strides in bringing into legal existence and operation, the African Continental Free Trade Area whose Agreement was signed on 21<sup>st</sup> March this year in Kigali, Rwanda. The theme is relevant because it resonates well with the African Union's theme for 2018", he explained. The Commissioner for Trade and Industry pointed out that the adoption of the theme by the AU Assembly shows the strong commitment of the political leaders to bring to an end this scourge that undermines sovereignty, democracy, governance, progress and dignity. "In my view, it will be difficult for the AfCFTA to achieve its intended objectives if we do not change the way we are doing business in combatting corruption in our institutions, including African Customs administrations" he underlined. According to the Commissioner, corruption violates human rights, undermines sustainable development and fuels social exclusion. In some countries, he said, there is also the danger of corrupt elements capturing State institutions and creating shadow and shadowy governments that serve their interests at the expense of the public good. Ambassador Muchanga indicated that digitalization of payments systems of African Customs administrations would greatly help in this connection. He urged participants to be in the frontline of developing electronic payments systems in their respective Customs administrations. "Through the AfCFTA, we are creating a new and promising future for Africa. To succeed in this historic task, integrity; among other values and capabilities, matters", he concluded.

In his remarks, the President of the Republic of Comoros, H. E. Mr. Azali Assoumani, expressed his gratitude to the African Union Commission and its Chairperson, H.E. Mr. Moussa Faki Mahamat for choosing Comoros to host the Meeting. He articulated his concern about Corruption which he said, is the scourge that strikes the world. "Corruption is a genuine gangrene for development, a brake to self-fulfilment, a real poison for the emancipation and well-being of our populations, especially when it is trivialized and unfortunately integrated into our way of life. Corruption scares away investment, tarnishes the confidence of development partners and has a lasting impact on the country's image", he indicated. The Head of State and Government added that he remains convinced that the task is immense and that the road will be long to eradicate this scourge that undermines Africa. He urged African leaders to take responsibility for its eradication. "Our continent is unfortunately indexed as one of the most corrupt regions in the world. It is then our responsibility, we as government authorities, to be vigilant and ruthless, rigorous and inflexible in the hunt for any form of corruption," he stressed. According to President Azali, African people would not appreciate if those who abuse their powers for personal gain, those who seek ease and comfort in corruption are left with impunity. "The meagre resources of our countries and our limited finances cannot benefit some and leave the sovereign people behind" he emphasized. The President also pointed out that customs are often singled out because they are the cornerstone of the stability of any country. "I know that effective measures are being taken, including digitalization, the strengthening

of moral and professional ethics to mitigate the impact of this scourge in customs," he concluded.

The 10<sup>th</sup> AU Sub-Committee of Directors General of Customs ended with a Moroni Declaration on Combating Corruption in Customs and the adoption of the AU Draft Trade Facilitation Strategy. Directors General of Customs undertook, among others, to support all initiatives aimed at eradicating corruption on the Continent. They also agreed to reinforce their internal mechanisms for combating corruption based on "Zero Tolerance".

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For further information, please contact **Mr. Dhunraj Kasee, Senior Policy Officer, Customs Cooperation** - Email: [KaseeD@africa-union.org](mailto:KaseeD@africa-union.org)

**Media contacts:**

**Patient Atcho**, Department of Trade and Industry – Tel: + 251 929335250 - Email: [atchop@africa-union.org](mailto:atchop@africa-union.org) and

**Esther Azaa Tankou**, Directorate of Information and Communication, AUC Tel. +251 911361185, E-mail: [yamboue@africa-union.org](mailto:yamboue@africa-union.org)

**For further information:** Directorate of Information and Communication | African Union Commission | E-mail: [DIC@african-union.org](mailto:DIC@african-union.org) | Web Site: [www.au.int](http://www.au.int) | Addis Ababa | Ethiopia

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