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UNION AFRICAINE

UNIÃO AFRICANA

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia P. O. Box 3243 Telephone: +251 11 551 7700 / +251 11 518 25
58/ Ext 2558

Website: www.au.int.

DIRECTORATE OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

Press Release N° / 2018

Zambia hosts First African Union Workshop *on Strengthening Regional Trade Policy Dialogue Platforms*



Lusaka, Zambia, 25 September 2018 - The African Union Commission (AUC) through the Department of Trade and Industry hosted the inaugural African Union Workshop *on Strengthening Regional Trade Policy Dialogue Platforms* from 25TH to 28TH September 2018. This innovative event, designed in partnership with COMESA and GIZ's support, aims at strengthening dialogue and inclusiveness in trade policy making processes. During the Workshop, participants will be sensitized on the Boosting Intra-African Trade (BIAT) Action Plan's recommendation on for "enhancing the role of the organized private sector, informal private sector and women in trade policy formulation through the establishment or strengthening of regular formal platforms on trade policy dialogue. An important part of the Workshop will be the training on stakeholders' engagement in trade and trade-related policies.

The Official Opening of the Workshop was presided by Mrs. Lilian Bwalya, Director for Foreign Trade, Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry, Republic of Zambia. Mrs. Lilian Bwalya, on behalf of the Zambian Government, thanked the AU Commission and its

partners for this great initiative to create a platform for exchange of views and experience on strengthening regional and national trade policy dialogue platforms. She urged participants to take advantage of the training on stakeholders' engagement to enhance their knowledge and capacity to formulate inclusive country's position in order to achieve a mutually beneficial AfCFTA Agreement.

Speaking on behalf of Commissioner for Trade and Industry of the African Union, Mr. Nadir Merah, Head of the Trade Division, pointed out that the workshop was vital for the mainstreaming of Trade policies across Africa because "trade policies and Agreements, by their nature have a wide effect on many stakeholders". Drawing from the Summit decision of 2012 to adopt an action plan Boost Inter- African trade (BIAT) Action Plan by the African Union Head of States and Government, which has seven clusters one of which is trade policy.

He stressed, that the BIAT Action Plan and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) are landmark initiatives with the potential to bring sustainable transformative change in Africa by promoting regional trade, and assisting AU Member States to achieve robust economic growth and sustainable development, leading ultimately to the realization of the aspirations of African Leaders contained in Agenda 2063 *The Africa We Want*.

Representing UNECA at the Official Opening, Mr. David Luke, Coordinator of the African Trade Policy Center, stated that the workshop came at an opportune time when so much progress in trade was being made both on the continent and the globe. He echoed that the EAC believed that it is only through dialogue among keys stakeholders that Africa would be able to strategically respond to emerging opportunities and challenges as well as defend its strategic interests. With this in mind he said that it is of outmost importance that all key players are given a platform to be engaged in the policy making both in the negotiation and implementation phases.

On behalf of COMESA Secretariat, Mr Tasara Muzorori, Senior Trade Officer, thanked the AU Commission for choosing COMESA to host the Workshop and for the partnership in organizing it. He stressed one of the key roles of COMESA as a REC "lies in its own institutions created intentionally to facilitate the progress of its regional economic integration programmes". He indicated that COMESA was eager to learn from other RECs attending the Workshop and to share its own experience of stakeholders' engagement, in particular in the conduct of the tripartite negotiations.

The meeting was attended by representatives from the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), AU Commission, the COMESA Secretariat and invited guests.

About the AfCFTA

AfCFTA is an [agenda 2063 flagship project](#), whose implementation is seen as key in accelerating Africa's growth. The main objectives of the AfCFTA are to create a continental market for goods and services, with free movement of business persons and investments, and thus pave the way for accelerating the realization of the African Economic Community as envisaged under the Abuja Treaty. The AfCFTA Agreement was launched by AU Heads of State and Government during their X Extraordinary Summit in Kigali, Rwanda. The Agreement has now been signed by 49 of AU Member States and ratified by 7 of them. The Agreement is expected to enter into force in 2019.

For further information, please contact **Mr. Jean Bertrand Azapmo – Regional Trade Advisor- Department of Trade and Industry** - Email AzapmoJ@africa-union.org or **Mr. Brian Mureverwi, Trade Advisor-Department of Trade and Industry-** Email MureverwiB@africa-union.org

Media contacts:

Ms Yafika Chitanda, Department of Trade and Industry – - Email: chitanday@africa-union.org

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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