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DIRECTORATE OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION
Press Release

Africa Making Encouraging Progress in the Ratification of the African Continental Free Trade Area, Says Auc Chairperson

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia 7th February 2019: The Chairperson of the African Union Commission (AUC) H.E Moussa Faki Mahamat, has described the progress made in the ratification of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) as “particularly encouraging”.



“At the current pace of ratification, we can anticipate the entry into force of the agreement in the coming weeks. I hope that the six countries that have not yet signed this instrument will do

so in the shortest possible time and that those who have already taken this step will quickly conclude the ratification procedures”, Mr Faki Mahamat said, as he addressed the opening ceremony of the African Union’s (AU) Executive meeting in Addis Ababa today. The AfCFTA is one of the AU’s priority projects under Agenda 2063.

But he also noted, as important, the need to be vigilant in ensuring that international commitments made by some Member States with third parties do not contradict the provisions of the Free Trade Area.

The attainment of the objectives of the Free Trade Area also implies the need to quicken the ratification of the Single Air Transport Market and the Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons, and the African passport, as part of the integration process. The Chairperson added that the establishment of the financial institutions of the Union namely the Central Bank, the investment bank and the African Monetary Fund, must be accelerated.

The African Union’s theme of this year is devoted to the issue of refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons. In this regard, Mr Faki Mahamat noted that this illustrates “the renewed commitment of our leaders to find sustainable responses to the prevalent issue of forced displacement”.

Chairperson Faki Mahamat recalled the imperative of ending conflicts and crises, another major pillar of Agenda 2063, and which he termed “the primary cause of forced displacement of persons.” Under the Agenda, Africa has set itself the target of

ending conflicts by 2020, a target that the Chairperson of the Commission described as “ambitious, but its realisation is not impossible if there is political will.”

In ensuring that there is progress in achieving the set commitments of Agenda 2063, the Chairperson recognized the need to fully maximize the potential of women and youth and recalled the appointment made last November of a youth envoy, Aya Chabi of Tunisia, as well as the establishment of a youth advisory council.

“An Africa in search of growth cannot afford the luxury of camps of unproductivity, with its kids out of schools and women living in a state of entrapment,” said United Nations Under Secretary General and Executive Secretary of the UN-Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), Dr. Vera Songwe in her opening remarks to the ministerial meeting. She noted that “Africa has the second highest burden of displacement, hosting about 37 percent of the world’s 19.6 million refugees and having 39.1 million internally displaced people. She urged the Ministers not to overlook the importance of the conventions and frameworks that the African Union has put in place, notably, the Kampala Convention in 2009, and the adoption of the Protocol on Free Movement, Right of Residence and Right of Establishment in January 2018 which, if implemented, can boost regional integration. Dr Songwe also pointed out that prolonged conflicts are a major contributing factor of the displacements on the continent, resulting from broken institutions, governance and leadership.

H.E Dr. Richard Sezibera, Chairperson of the Executive Council, in his opening address pointed out the importance of the Executive Council meeting, as the Union is undergoing institutional reforms which will ensure the efficient running of the AU Commission. “The new scale of assessment for the contribution of both the regular budget and the peace fund are paramount in the quest to self-financing of the Union and continental leadership, hence there is need to ensure its speedy implementation and follow-through”, said H.E Dr. Richard Sezibera.

The opening ceremony of the Executive Council, took place in the presence of the Foreign Affairs Ministers of AU Member States, AU Commissioners, Heads of the Regional Economic Communities (RECs), AUC senior officials and staff, as well as other invited guests. Over the next two days, they will prepare for the 32nd meeting of the Assembly of the AU, which will be held on 10-11 February 2019. They will also consider and deliberate on the draft agenda, and the draft decisions and declarations that came out of the meeting of the Permanent Representative Committee (PRC) from 15th-16th January 2019. **FA/ am/wzm**

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