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DIRECTORATE OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

PRESS RELEASE

Launching of the AeTrade Regional Headquarters in Eswatini



4 October 2019 - His Majesty King Mswati III launched the AeTrade Regional Office for Southern Africa at Mandvulo Grand Hall at Lozitha Palace in the presence of several dignitaries including the former Prime Minister of Ethiopia, H.E. Hailemariam Desalegn, Mr. Wahid Adily, the representative of the African Union Chairperson, H.E. President of the Arab Republic of Egypt, a representative of the President of Zimbabwe, Ambassador Rosette Nyirinkinde Katungye representing H.E. the Chairperson of the African Union Commission H.E. Rekiya Edderhem, State Secretary for Foreign Trade of the Kingdom of Morocco, and the Chairperson of the Specialised Technical Committee on Trade, Industry and Minerals, the Minister of Education, Science and Technology of the Government of Mozambique and several dignitaries and members of the diplomatic corps accredited to Eswatini including Malawi, Botswana, South Africa, India, AeTrade Group Directors, Partners and various national stakeholders graced the occasion of the launch. The official logo and AeTrade theme song were unveiled during this important ceremony.

The AeTrade initiative aims to create 600,000 SMEs which will in turn create 22 million jobs. The Host Agreement was signed by the AeTrade and the Government of Eswatini on the 4th October 2019 at Mandvulo Grand Hall at Ezulwini.

Speaking at the Launch, the speakers focused on the strategic importance of the digital economy and welcomed the Diaspora-led Pan African initiative by the AeTrade Group with its inclusive social entrepreneurship model. H.E. Hailemariam Desalegn thanked His Majesty King Mswati III stating that *“the AeTrade acknowledge this land which we wish to call “the welcoming land” for all Africans on the continent and in the Diaspora”*. As he launched the regional office for Southern Africa of the African Electronic Trade Group His Majesty King Mswati III stated that this initiative *“will fast track the realization of Agenda 2063 objectives of the Africa We Want. And we thank our forebearers for the political emancipation. The challenge that lies before us is to take the baton and liberate the continent economically”*. His Majesty King Mswati III pledged to champion the Pan African e-commerce Platform and related initiatives amongst Heads of State and Government as well as international partners.

The representative of the Chairperson of the African Union conveyed the warm congratulations of H.E. President El-Sisi on the launching the regional offices of AeTrade in Southern Africa. In delivering the official statement he emphasized that *“due to the magnitude of this endeavor which is African designed, African led and African executed, it deserves our attention and support.”*

Furthermore, Eswatini committed to work closely with all the countries in the Southern African region in order to ensure the goals of job creation and boosting intra-African trade are met. As the Host Government for the Southern African Regional Headquarters they announced the intention to participate at the highest level at each of the regional, continental and global launch events in order to support the roll out of the initiative. Finally, in a special address in the launch video His Majesty emphasized that he was offering the AeTrade Group a permanent home in the Kingdom of Eswatini.

The launch took place soon after African Union Heads of State and Government marked the entry into force of the AfCFTA Agreement in Niamey, Niger in July 2019. The African Union was congratulated for the progress made in the negotiations and urged to maintain the momentum to attain universal ratification as soon as possible which would then pave the way for the Continental E-Commerce Platform to be the enabler for the implementation of the AfCFTA Agreement. Ambassador Rosette Nyirinkinde Katungye congratulated the Kingdom of Eswatini and reaffirmed the commitment of the African Union Commission, in line with the Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2018, to enhance the cooperation with the AeTrade Group and all AU member states within the context of the Digital Transformation Strategy that is under development.

Mr. Muluaem Syoum, CEO and Chairman of the AeTrade Group thanked all those present at the launch and in particular the Government and people of Eswatini for the warm reception of the AeTrade Group. He pledged to work with Governments, Private Sector, Women and Youth to bring a new way of doing business using various technologies that foster collaboration, strategic alliances and public-private partners

that will create shared prosperity on the continent. *“The AeTrade Group has taken into account the current state of e-commerce at the continental level and we know that if we want to make significant progress with a view to making Africa a major player in the global economy we must set audacious and strategic goals and objectives”.*

In the same vein, a high-level Business Forum took place on the 3rd October 2019 at Mavuso Trading Centre under the auspices co-organised by the AeTrade Group, the Government of the Kingdom of Eswatini and Business Eswatini. The Business Forum was attended by several Ministers, Ambassadors, Private Sector Leaders, UN leadership, and one hundred senior representatives from the Public and Private Sector from different countries in Africa and the Diaspora. The Business Forum was officially opened by the Right Honourable Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Eswatini. A Key Note Presentation on SMEs was made by H.E. Rekiya Edderhem, Chairperson of the Specialised Technical Committee on Trade, Industry and Minerals. At the end of the two days she concluded that the two days were *“an opportunity for a very fruitful exchange of views and to discuss ways and means to accelerate implementation alongside the operational phase of the AfCFTA. The aim is to open up massive opportunities for regional value chains development, industrialization and diversification, reducing dependency on commodity exports as well as enhancing cross border trade in Africa.”*

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