

DIRECTORATE OF INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION

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Venue: Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

### **The African Union Commission holds the 3<sup>rd</sup> AU Symposium on Special Economic Zones and Green Industrialization**

The African Union Commission (AUC) through its Department of Trade and Industry organized the 3<sup>rd</sup> African Union (AU) Symposium on Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and Green Industrialization from 28<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> September 2020. The objective of the symposium was to provide a platform for SEZ, and green industrialization policy makers, practitioners, financial institutions, investors and academia, AU Member States and other countries with a focus on identifying good practices for SEZ planning, development and operationalization. The symposium exchanged views and experiences on how SEZs can be utilized as vehicles for industrialization in African countries. Particular emphasis was placed on green industrialization as production centers to supply the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), and foster Regional Value Chains.

The zoom virtual webinar was being attended by participants and experts from COMESA, EAC, ECOWAS, Egypt, Ghana, Germany, Nigeria, Mali, Academia, AZI-SA, AEZO, African Development Bank Group, China-Africa Advisory, European Bank for Reconstruction, and Development, Ethiopian Investment Commission, ILO, NEPZA, Rwanda Development Board, Tanger Med Zones, UNCTAD, UNIDO, Suez Canal Economic Zone, World Bank, African Development Bank Group, and different experts on SEZs and Industrial parks.

In his opening remarks, Amb. Albert M. Muchanga, Commissioner for Trade and Industry at the AUC, welcomed the panellists and participants, and he acknowledged the support of GIZ for its continued financial, and technical support to programmes of development across the continent and the AfCFTA in particular. The commissioner urged SEZs operators to use this pandemic as an opportunity. “The targeted outcome of this Symposium is to come up with ways and means of addressing the challenges faced by Special Economic Zones in the face of the COVID-19 Pandemic,” he added.

Taking the floor, Amb. Stephan Auer, German Ambassador to the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, and the African Union Commission, highlighted the importance of Special Economic Zones and Green Industrialization in Africa’s Industrialization strategy, and mitigation of the ongoing pandemic in light of the AfCFTA. “the AfCFTA can positively impact special economic zones by eliminating trade barriers on the continent, tariff, and non-tariff barriers...investment infrastructure, border one-stop shops,” he reiterated. The Ambassador called on African Union Member States to reform the Special Economic Zones laws, and

best practices for eco-industrial parks.

Mr. Ahmed Bennis, Secretary General of the Africa Economic Zones Organization, expressed gratitude to Commissioner Muchanga and the entire technical team of the AUC, and hence pinpoint the importance of SEZs. “They are also one of the main devices to advance the objectives of the AfCFTA in driving sustainable economic growth, job creation, investment promotion, trade liberalization and regional integration and cooperation,” he underscored.

The objective of the Symposium was to provide a platform for SEZ policymakers, operators and experts, financial institutions and academia to exchange views and experiences on SEZ policy, planning, financing, development and operation in the context of fostering environmental and social sustainability. This year, the Symposium focus on AfCFTA, exploring challenges and opportunities for SEZs under the continental free trade area as well as how SEZs can contribute to the realization of AfCFTA and its objectives, and related planning concepts such as Low- carbon Towns, Green Business Zones, Ecocity, Smart city and Eco-Industrial Parks.

In her closing remarks, Mrs. Ron Osman Omar, Officer in charge for the Industry Division thanked the speakers for bringing their diverse expertise to the symposium and informed the meeting that the AUC is using the outcome of this symposium to set up an ambitious and actionable SEZ Agenda aimed at standardizing SEZs on the continent.

The targeted outcome of this Symposium is to come up with ways and means of addressing the challenges faced by special economic zones in the face of the COVID-19 Pandemic, and the major disruptions around the world, including Africa, and SEZs to be used as production centers to supply the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), and foster regional value chains.

#### **For additional information**

**Mrs. Ron Osman Omar** | Department of Trade and Industry, African Union Commission | E- mail: [OmarR@africa-union.org](mailto:OmarR@africa-union.org)

#### **Media Contact:**

**Mr. Molalet Tsedeke**, Directorate of Information and Communication, AUC, Tel: 0911-630631; Email: [molalett@africa-union.org](mailto:molalett@africa-union.org);

**Mrs. Meaza Tezera**, Department of Trade and Industry, AUC – Tel: + 251 912120442 - Email: [Meazat@africa-union.org](mailto:Meazat@africa-union.org)

#### **For further information please contact:**

**Directorate of Information and Communication** | African Union Commission | E-mail: [DIC@african-union.org](mailto:DIC@african-union.org) |  
**Website:** [www.au.africa](http://www.au.africa) | Addis Ababa | Ethiopia Follow Us: [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [LinkedIn](#) | [Instagram](#) | [YouTube](#)