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OPENING STATEMENT

BY

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ON THE OCCASION OF THE CONSULTATIVE MEETING
OF THE SENIOR OFFICIALS OF THE COMMITTEE
OF THE ASSEMBLY OF HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT
ON BOOSTING INTRA-AFRICAN TRADE

ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA

3 – 4 APRIL 2012

Excellencies

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

1. Please allow me to begin by welcoming you all, on behalf of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, H.E. Dr. Jean Ping, and indeed on my own behalf, to the headquarters of the African Union (AU), here in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. H.E. Dr. Jean Ping wishes your meeting great success.

Excellencies

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

2. The theme of the last Summit of African Union Heads of State and Government in January 2012 was on “boosting intra-African trade”. You may recall that during the said Summit, African Union Heads of State and Government adopted Decisions and a Declaration, namely, an Action Plan and a Framework Document detailing a Road Map for the establishment of a Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) by an indicative date of 2017, aimed at boosting intra-African trade.

3. Further, the Assembly, while deliberating, raised a number of issues for reflection. These included the need to place more emphasis on investment in infrastructure, given its critical role in promoting intra-African trade; creating additional structures to the already existing ones in the African Union (AU) operational frame, as proposed in the CFTA Road Map, and perhaps far more reaching of all was the 2017 indicative date for the establishment of the CFTA.

4. It was not surprising that the Heads of State and Government raised these issues. Indeed, these were the same issues that had confronted you in the several debates, meetings and brainstorming sessions held before the Summit. They were also the same issues that

arose at the AU Trade Ministers Conference held in Accra, Ghana, in December 2011, where the Action Plan and the Framework Document on the establishment of the CFTA were adopted and recommended to the January 2012 AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government.

5. Despite the concerns that were raised, the Heads of State and Government, in their collective resolve and wisdom, recognised the need to make progress. They, therefore, adopted the Decisions and the Declaration on the theme of their Summit, namely, “boosting intra-African trade”. In addition, they decided to establish a Committee of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government on Boosting Intra-African Trade to further reflect on the issues raised, with a view to providing guidance to the July 2012 Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the African Union to be held in Lilongwe, Malawi, whose theme would also be on “boosting intra-African trade”. It is within this context that your meeting of Senior Officials is taking place today and tomorrow, here in Addis Ababa.

6. The objective of this meeting is to kick-start a consultative process, which brings together, in addition to the Senior Officials, the Regional Economic Communities (RECs), the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the African Development Bank (AfDB), representatives of the African private sector and the African Union Commission (AUC). This is done with a view to providing advice to the Committee of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government. This consultative process is on issues that were raised during the January 2012 AU Summit while debating its theme on “boosting intra-African trade”.

7. The meeting will also examine the Terms of Reference (ToRs) for the High Level African Trade Committee (HATC), as proposed in the

CFTA Road Map. The HATC, you may recall, will be responsible for monitoring and mentoring the CFTA process, sharing experiences in regional integration and providing advice to the AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government on the implementation of the Action Plan for Boosting Intra-African Trade.

8. Further, the meeting provides the opportunity to review the Work Plan for the implementation of the Decisions of the January 2012 AU Summit before being presented to the next AU Summit in Lilongwe, Malawi. The meeting will also provide you with the opportunity to discuss the modalities for implementing the Action Plan for boosting intra-African trade, which covers areas such as formulation of trade policy, trade facilitation, enhancing productive capacity, investing in infrastructure, provision of trade finance and trade support, and provision of trade information.

Excellencies

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

9. Looking at the items on the agenda of your meeting, you will agree that there are high expectations from you, particularly in terms of what you propose regarding the Work Plan aimed at implementing the Decisions on boosting intra-African Trade. This is certainly the beginning. Therefore, more work and efforts will need to be made. Among others, the task of this meeting will be to do a critical review of the draft Work Plan and make suggestions and inputs that will enrich it, including those that can be taken into account even as we move beyond 2013. More important is that the outcome of this meeting will be the basis for discussions at the levels of the Committee of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government on Boosting Intra-African Trade and the

July 2012 AU Summit. It is, therefore, my sincere hope that this meeting will come up with harmonised views and positions on the way forward that will contribute to the success of the July 2012 AU Summit.

10. This meeting and subsequent ones to follow, and every effort being put into the process, are all geared towards one major objective: how to boost intra-African trade, and ultimately, how to ensure effective integration of Africa into the global economy. In this regard, on the agenda for the meeting are items including Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) negotiations, AGOA Forum and UNCTAD XIII Conference. These issues all play critical roles in Africa's bilateral and multilateral engagements with the rest of the world, and outcomes such as those of the EPA could have far reaching implications for Africa's overall integration objectives, if not balanced and well defined in the overall interests of Africa. I, therefore, invite you to do your utmost in reviewing developments on these issues, including Africa's preparation for and participation in the forthcoming UNCTAD XIII Conference.

11. As we look forward to these two days of deliberation, I have no doubt in my mind that the meeting will come up with recommendations that will be highly satisfactory, both for purposes of informing the July 2012 Summit, as well as ensuring the effective engagement of Africa with Partners at the bilateral and multilateral levels.

12. I thank you most sincerely for honouring our invitation and avail myself of this opportunity to wish you all very successful and fruitful deliberations.

13. I thank you.