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**Creating One African Market**

**Statement Delivered by Ambassador Albert M.  
Muchanga, African Union Commissioner for Trade  
and Industry**

**at**

**The 2017 African Prosperity Conference**

**Held From**

**September 12-13, 2017,**

**In**

**Accra, Ghana**

**Your Excellency Nana Akufo-Addo, President of the Republic of Ghana;**

**Honorable Alan Kyerematen, Minister of Trade and Industry of the Republic of  
Ghana;**

**Nana Dr. Appigaei Dankawasso, President of the Ghana Chamber of Commerce and  
Industry, and the Pan African Chamber of Commerce and Industry;**

**Dr. David Luke, Coordinator of the African Trade Policy Center of United Nations  
Economic Commission for Africa and the African Union Commission;**

**Mr. Tewolde Gebremariam, Chief Executive Officer of the Ethiopian Airlines  
Corporation;**

**Distinguished Conference Participants;**

**Ladies and Gentlemen.**

I am very delighted to be with you this morning.

The private sector is a key partner in our journey of expanding and exploiting opportunities for prosperity in our continent.

The theme for this conference: “**The Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) - Exploring Possibilities for Business Engagement across Africa**” underscores our partnership.

We create opportunities, you exploit them. Africa prospers and moves forward.

Before I go any further, I have a duty to express our deep gratitude to the private sector, people and Government of the Republic of Ghana for the boundless hospitality accorded to my delegation and I since our arrival.

We feel we are among friends, brothers and sisters.

We thank you very much for your warm welcome and abundant generosity.

**Your Excellency,**

**Distinguished Conference Participants.**

From the outset, I would like to state that in the discussions that will follow during the course of this Conference, you will be given details on where we are, in bringing to life, the Continental Free Trade Area.

All I can say at this stage is that we are moving in the right direction and we are on track.

**Your Excellency,**

**Distinguished Conference Participants,**

We were requested to give you the official message from the African Union.

My key message is that the negotiations on a legal text establishing the Continental Free Trade Area will be concluded by December this year, as decided by the Assembly of the African Union Heads of State and Government. This was a decision reaffirmed this past July.

When established, the Continental Free Trade Area will offer immense possibilities for business engagement across Africa.

We shall have an integrated market of 55 countries with a combined population of about 1.2 billion people and aggregate gross domestic product of about US\$3.4 trillion.

In this integrated market, goods and services will move freely and this will increase trade among our countries and yourselves as businesses.

That single step of promoting intra-African trade will reduce costs and increase consumer choice and demand.

We are also mindful of the fact that Africa has a growing middle class which will facilitate rapid growth of consumer demand and business expansion.

**Your Excellency,**

**Distinguished Conference Participants,**

Through the Continental Free Trade Area, we are creating a borderless Africa where ordinary people and business will enjoy free movement across the Continent.

We are also embarking on making the customs administrations on the Continent more efficient and responsive to the needs of business.

Equally important, we are promoting open skies to improve connectivity and competitiveness of air transport. This will save time and money for travelers.

On the ground, we are establishing high speed train networks across the width and breadth of our Continent to rapidly and cost effectively move people and goods, again, saving time and money.

We are also investing in education and training to make the young generation meet the skills and qualifications needs of business, both of which are key to productivity and competitiveness.

From the foregoing listing which is not exhaustive, I am sure you will all agree with me that

the Continental Free Trade Area offers your businesses ample opportunities and economies of scale. It is clearly a large and attractive market, with huge potential to grow very rapidly.

With the outlined investments in infrastructure and trade facilitation across Africa, we are also creating conditions for your companies to operate in the continental market with reduced costs of doing business.

With enhanced ease of doing business, you will be able to deliver products to your customers in good time as well as operate across the Continent cost effectively. You will simply be more competitive.

Through the Continental Free Trade Area, we are redrawing, with better prospects for business, the economic and commercial landscape of Africa.

We are also creating a politically stable market. We plan to silence the guns by 2020.

When peace in Africa comes to reign supreme, investors, manufacturers and traders will be able to make long- term plans with enhanced certainty of growing their businesses and reaping high returns in the process.

As we create this harmonized, attractive, large and growing market, your end of the bargain as the private sector is to give us quality, affordable and safe products and services that will facilitate increased intra-African trade.

May, I, at the end of your deliberations get assurances that you will fulfill your end of this bargain.

**Your Excellency,**

**Distinguished Conference Participants,**

All said this far, the Continental Free Trade Area has the built-in possibilities to change Africa's economic prospects for better and in the process, enhance our development prospects as well as commercial gains for businesses.

The Continental Free Trade Area will create more competitive business opportunities beyond Africa by facilitating increased shares of global trade. This will in turn change our economic relations and competitive advantage with the rest of the world.

A day should emerge, in the not too distant future, when some of your companies will transform into multinational corporations, not just across Africa, but in many parts of the world as well. The Continental Free Trade Area is a stepping stone towards that grand vision.

**Your Excellency,**

**Distinguished Conference participants,**

Against the background of all these initiatives and prospects, demography and nature also favour us as Africa.

We are a young Continent, the median age being around 19 years. Between now and 2050, the median age of Africans will be 24.8 years, still making us the youngest population in the world.

This is a source of vitality if we provide high quality education to our youth that is also responsive to the needs of industry. The end of the bargain is for the private sector, with appropriate incentives from governments, to create decent jobs for our youth.

If we all fail in this bargain, our youth will continue trekking to other parts of the world and

in their search for the mirage of a better future, become victims of human trafficking and other dangers.

Nature also favours Africa. We have abundant natural resources such as sunshine, sand, fresh water, vast agricultural lands, oil, mineral resources, forests and; fish, among others.

We could go on mentioning them. The list is as limitless as the opportunities that lie in nature's gift to Africa.

Regrettably, we have so far, not made it possible for Africa to derive maximum benefits from these vast natural resources.

This is a collective indictment on each and every one of us.

Just a few days ago, I was reading an online article quoting the head of the African Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs in the United States Administration stating that criminals generate about US\$40 billion every year from environmental crimes in Africa.

This is just one sector involving illicit activities.

Even from this single sector, the message is very clear.

And it is that Africa must rise to the challenge of ensuring that our citizens benefit the most from all our natural resources. The so-called resource curse should be transformed into a blessing and tangible benefits for our people.

If we fail to rise to the challenge, we should stop wondering why, after more than fifty years of independence, Africa is still making a slow, very slow ascent to prosperity.

It is so slow a climb towards prosperity that we cannot reduce poverty levels in many of our countries.

It is progress so slow that for decades to come, Africa will have the largest number of Least Developed Countries relative to the rest of the world.

Yes, we are the world's poorest region, in spite of our vast potentials.

All of us as Africans have the historic duty to reduce our collective poverty and usher in, an era of prosperity.

Crucially, we rely on you as business to harness your entrepreneurship, innovativeness, vision and leadership to bring about this transformation.

**Your Excellency,**

**Distinguished Conference Participants.**

Let me come back to the theme of this Conference and amplify the message of the African Union Commission to the Private Sector regarding the Continental Free Trade Area.

Intra-African trade is poised to increase by as much as 50% when the Continental Free Trade Area is in operation, rising from the current 12-18%, depending on sources of data. We have built-in incentives for market expansion. We invite you all to enter this large market and thrive in it. We are open for business.

The Continental Free Trade Area will also increase Africa's share of world trade from 3-6% within its first decade of operation. This will both open up new market opportunities and increase our bargaining power in our economic and commercial engagements with the rest of the world.

**Distinguished Conference Participants,**

As I conclude, may I reiterate that I came here with enthusiasm and excitement.



This is because you are a wonderful group that is passionate about moving Africa forward as reflected in your theme as well as the articles that you have been running in African newspapers on the Continental Free Trade Area.

I share your enthusiasm and passion for Africa's progress.

We are natural partners.

In this respect, I ask of you the following as I end my address:

- Let us work together in realizing the objectives of the Continental Free Area for the progress of Africa;
- Help us in the lobby effort to ensure that the legal text of the Continental Free Trade Area is ratified with minimum delay after its signature by your respective governments;
- Feel free to engage us with proposals on additional incentives that you would like to see embedded in the CFTA legal text so that we make it more business friendly;
- Give us your ideas on the organization and expected outcomes of the African Union-European Union Business Forum to be held in November this year on the margins of the African Union-European Union Summit. We would like to generate outcomes that strengthen and benefit the African private sector;
- Enhance your participation in the annual African Economic Platform where we aim at establishing a meeting of minds on how to move Africa forward using dialogue and mutual understanding among government, the private sector, academia and civil society on critical issues. The African Development Bank is creating an African Investment Platform this year. We are working with our sister organization to come up with an arrangement where these two events will in future be held back to back; with the African Economic Platform still serving as the dialogue segment while the African Investment Forum will be the transactions segment. This arrangement will

bring participants to the two events in one location at the same time; in each given year; and, in the process, save them time and money;

- Finally, but not the least, commit to enhancing your competitiveness and protection of intellectual property rights as levers of business success. We will, in 2018, come up with Pan-African policies on competition and intellectual property rights which will entrench the Continental Free Trade Area as a hub of innovation and prosperity with a level playing field.

I would like to end by stating that as we work towards establishing the Continental Free Trade Area, we should always remain passionate about this project. As I said earlier, I am elated with your passion on the project thus far.

Keep it that way.

Passion will give us more energy to move forward.

I thank you all for your kind attention.