

**AFRICAN UNION**

**الاتحاد الأفريقي**



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**STATEMENT BY  
H.E HOPE TUMUKUNDE GASATURA,  
CHAIR OF THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE  
COUNCIL  
DELIVERED AT THE OPENING OF THE  
PRC  
KIGALI, RWANDA  
MARCH 2018**

**Your Excellency, Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the AU Commission;**

**Excellences, members of the PRC;**

**Excellences Heads of Regional Economic Communities;**

**Your Excellences Commissioners and staff of the AU present;**

**Distinguished delegates;**

**Ladies and gentlemen;**

Let me begin by warmly welcoming you all to this session of the Permanent Representatives Committee.

It is also my pleasure to welcome you all to Kigali and hope that your stay will be memorable.

I would like to thank the African Ministers of Trade for their excellent work over the past two and a half years since the start of the Phase 1 negotiations of the AfCFTA which has made it possible for us to gather here in Kigali to launch this important flagship project of AU's agenda 2063.

I would like to equally commend the work of the Specialized Technical Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs for the excellent work accomplished at their extraordinary session held here in Kigali last week for the legal cleaning of the texts.

Most importantly, I wish to recognize and appreciate the work of H.E Mahamadou Issoufou, President of the Republic of Niger and leader of the African Continental Free Trade Area for his relentless efforts and invaluable contributions towards the realization of the African Continental Free Trade Area. His Championing role has been very critical in this process.

### **Your Excellencies;**

At the founding of the Organization of African Unity, Kwame Nkrumah made a clarion call that 'Africa Must Unite'.

His vision and that of other founding fathers of our organization were very instrumental in the creation of regional economic communities like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in 1975, Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC) in 1980 which later became the Southern African Development Community (SADC), as well as the Preferential Trade Area for Eastern and Southern African States (PTA) in 1982 which later became the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA); among several other regional economic communities on the Continent.

Further developments came with the Lagos Plan of Action and Final Act of Lagos in 1980 to guide the Continent's structural transformation, development and continent-wide integration in the period 1980 - 2000. Africa built on this foundation in 1991, with the Abuja Treaty which outlined phases of the Continent's integration from 1991 to 2034.

An added impetus was given to the implementation of the Abuja Treaty in January 2012 in Addis Ababa, when the African Union Heads of State and Government adopted the Action Plan for Boosting Intra-African Trade (BIAT)

and agreed on a roadmap for the establishment of an African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) by 2017.

This was followed with the launch of the negotiations for the establishment of the African Continental Free Trade Area in Johannesburg, South Africa in June 2015.

Against this rich background of common efforts to develop and improve the quality of life of all the people of Africa, the actual negotiations started in February 2016 following the establishment of the AfCFTA Negotiating Forum (NF). This hard working team of continental civil servants has worked tirelessly on the legal texts we have before us this morning as we prepare for the work of the Executive Council and the Assembly.

**Your Excellences;**

**Ladies and Gentlemen.**

As you are all aware, the establishment of the AfCFTA is a critical political priority of our African Union leadership. It is also a flagship project of the African Union Agenda 2063.

It is important to also recall that apart from being a technical exercise of trade negotiations, the AfCFTA negotiations also reflect a political process. The AfCFTA is not just about trade liberalization for its own sake, but rather it is also a political reflection of our leaders' commitment to finding joint solutions for African problems. It should be emphasized that the AfCFTA is a political exercise aimed at strengthening and deepening our fragmented African markets, for the benefit of our African producers and consumers. It is a political statement and declaration of the idea of African Unity in economic and commercial terms. Without the AfCFTA and Africa's economic integration,

rhetoric about African unity will remain empty and undermine our credibility in the eyes of our citizens who would like to see tangible benefits flowing from the process of continental integration.

It is remarkable that even as our Chief Trade Negotiators negotiated the AfCFTA legal texts, the eyes and expectations of the entire continent, even the rest of the world, have been on them. I must commend them since they discharged their duties with maturity, understanding and with a spirit of compromise. As has been stressed before, these negotiations have not been like others we have for instance had with partners outside the continent. Instead, these have been a set of negotiations among brothers and sisters with a strong spirit of give and take.

By establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area, through a commercially meaningful package of agreements, Africa is now poised to attract investments from both within Africa and the world at large. Through this, Africa's integration in trade terms can begin. Jobs would be created. Entrepreneurs will expand their businesses. African value chains will be developed and maintained, and those value chains will be linked to global value chains. All of these developments would contribute to the transformation of our continent. Our young people will have genuine employment opportunities on the continent and no longer hanger for greener pastures in Europe or elsewhere because the greener pastures would be here.

The legal texts have there fore gone through intense negotiations, I believe our work and that of the Executive Council will be smooth as we prepare for submission of the legal instruments for adoption by the Assembly.

**Your Excellences;**

**Ladies and Gentlemen.**

We are also happy to take note of the Transitional Implementation Work Program in which remaining bulky issues will be dealt with as part of a built -in Agenda, including the schedules of commitments under the Protocols on Trade in Services and Trade in Goods. We urge our hardworking Chief Negotiators continue these negotiations in the same spirit of solidarity and cooperation that they negotiated the main texts.

At the same time, I would like to urge all of us Permanent Representatives to use our best efforts once the instruments are adopted by the Assembly, to ensure that the AfCFTA Agreement gets ratified as soon as possible so it can come into force without delay, and implementation can begin. Our people can no longer wait for our economic fortunes to change. We are the change agents. We Africans have to create our own future. Nobody will do it for us. And this is a cardinal lesson of history.

I trust a number of our Heads of State and Government will sign the AfCFTA Agreement during the Extra – Ordinary Session of the Assembly on 21 March 2018

**Your Excellencies;**

**Ladies and Gentlemen.**

Our Ministers of Trade and Justice have recommended to us the legal texts before us. I urge all of us to take note of these texts, comment, and forward them to the Executive Council for further processing.

I wish you a happy stay in Kigali, and I thank you all for your kind attention.