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**STATEMENT BY  
CHAIR OF THE AFRICAN UNION EXECUTIVE COUNCIL  
DELIVERED AT THE OPENING OF THE  
EXECUTIVE COUNCIL  
KIGALI, RWANDA  
MARCH 2018**

- **Your Excellency, Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the Au Commission;**
- **Hon Ministers;**
- **AUC Commissioners and staff, here present;**
- **Representatives of Regional Economic Communities;**
- **AU partners;**
- **Distinguished delegates;**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen.**

Welcome once again to Kigali where most of you I believe are already feeling at home. I recognize very many familiar faces in this room. For those whose first time this is, we want you to feel among good friends and we invite you to take the time to visit the city. I was going to apologize for the rain but some of our relatives from the Sahel said it is a blessing. So I will not apologize for the rain. We wish that this time in Kigali be a time of work but also a time to mingle, to exchange, to get to know each other better. Your Rwandan brothers and sisters wish you a very pleasant stay, here, in Rwanda.

I am just extremely pleased to take part in this eighteenth Extraordinary Session of the Executive Council on the African Continental Free Trade area (AfCFTA).

Let me also thank very sincerely our Permanent Representatives who met in Kigali on 17<sup>th</sup> March and I thank them for the invaluable work done in preparing for our session today. Thank you very much the PRC.

As a flagship project of Agenda 2063, the AfCFTA is one of our key milestones, a critical initiative that has the ability to bring about the social and economic changes that Africa has been envisioning for decades among many other

flagship projects. I am therefore glad to see many of us reunited here to finally make this dream a reality.

Prior to our session, several trade and justice meetings at both the technical and ministerial level have been held to consider and adopt the AfCFTA legal instruments. I thank our experts and Ministers for negotiating and agreeing on the text to be signed in this very room on 21 March and we look forward to marking this time in the history of our continent. A few issues have been referred to us for consideration. I believe that the concerned Ministers agreed to and adopted the substance of AfCFTA legal instruments and I believe that our duty as Foreign Ministers is to provide guidance on any outstanding matters and drive this process forward without getting into debates on legal and trade issues which for many of us are outside our competence.

With the adoption of the AfCFTA Agreement, it will then be important for all our countries, hopefully, to sign it soon, so we can proceed with **speedy ratification and implementation** even as every country gets in its comfort zone to make this AfCFTA a reality. Indeed, this Agreement is not just a simple document, it has critical economic implications for African populations. It will open up a market of 1.2 billion people, with the possibility of generating enormous wealth on the continent through accelerated investment, economic diversification and increased trade. As any agreement of this type, the drive is continental, the implementation can be gradual as long as we get where we want to go.

However, we should realize that what we make of the AfCFTA is up to us. We are the member states of this beautiful organization and we drive the process of

development on this continent. We have the choice to translate vast potential into concrete reality and each of us has to do their part. Our countries have to work on establishing the administrative, legal and logistical structures that will make use of this great opportunity. Burdensome regulations, access to finance by the private sector, infrastructure networks, and simplification of customs processes are some of the practical challenges that must be addressed beyond the signing ceremony, if we want to significantly increase intra-Africa trade.

**Your Excellencies,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The entire package of legal texts encompassing the AfCTA Protocols and annexes, is a comprehensive instrument meant to help us build the “Africa we Want”. For us in this room, this morning and many people outside this room, this morning the “Africa we Want” is not just a slogan. It is a sincere wish and we know that we will get it. An Africa where our companies would have the benefit of highly trained **professionals** using their **innovative ideas** to develop products according to best **standards**, using **rules of origin** that make it easier for their goods to qualify as “originating products”; an Africa where their goods and services would face very few **technical barriers to trade** or **non-tariff barriers**, as those goods pass through efficient **customs** systems to cross borders, while using world class **transportation** and **logistics** systems to facilitate such trade.

With the AfCTA-related agreements before us, we are now well armed to improve our social structures, to improve the livelihoods of even our poorest communities and all of us have poor communities, and to develop regional and

continental value chains to ensure prosperity and well-being for all our people. We are well equipped to ensure a better future for future generations. Indeed, we should not forget either that this Agreement plans to make Africa a more attractive destination for inward and foreign **investment**. As you know, Phase 2 of the AfCFTA negotiations starting later this year, aims for this goal by addressing key trade issues such as **competition, investment and intellectual property rights**.

**Your Excellencies,**

**Dear Brothers and Sisters,**

This Agreement must enter into force as soon as possible. Again, with everybody feeling comfortable about it. By signing and ratifying it, we would signal to the African people first and foremost and to the world at large, that we are determined to play our part as a global player while promoting the continent's economic interests as one, through a single African market. This should not only win us the confidence of the investment community but provide increased bargaining power in future partnership agreements, as well as for our own business sector, to help secure the best deals for African businesses is part of what we want to achieve. We need those investments to generate badly needed jobs and again improve the lives of our populations.

Looking further into Agenda 2063, we should also be reminded that the continental free trade area is one of several flagship projects – alongside the Single African Air Travel Market and the Free Movement of People – whose overall impact on the continent's socio-economic development would be multiplied if undertaken concurrently. Therefore, our greater aim should be to

fast-track approval and implementation of all flagship projects, such as the one submitted to us today.

On the future of ACP which is part of the discussions later today, let me thank our Ambassadors and High Commissioners in Addis Ababa, Brussels and Geneva who have worked tirelessly to develop a Common African Position for our new cooperation framework with the European Union replacing the ACP come 2020.

The framework as rightly proposed should among others be all inclusive and Africa's engagement and negotiations should be based on clear continental priorities.

It should also be a continent-to-continent framework building on the already existing Framework between Africa and Europe. This Framework should fit with the times we live in today and again serve the interest of our side of the deal.

Let me conclude by urging you that our work here today should contribute to the celebrations expected on the 21<sup>st</sup> March 2018 as we launch the African continental free trade area.

I thank you all for your attention.