



8th Joint Annual Meetings of the Conference of Ministers (ECA-AU)
Side Event on the Continental Free Trade Area Negotiations

Organized by ECA African Trade Policy Centre (ATPC) and AUC Trade and Industry Department (DTI)

Background:

The year 2015 offers an historical opportunity for a major step to be taken towards the integration of the African continent – the launch of negotiations for a Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA). This is in line with the January 2012 Decision taken at the 18th Ordinary Session of the African Union Assembly of Heads of State and Government to begin negotiations for a CFTA by 2015 with 2017 as the indicative date for the finalization of the essential core of an agreement. The January 2012 Summit also adopted an Action Plan for boosting intra-African trade (BIAT) to be implemented alongside the CFTA.

The CFTA is recognized in the African Union’s Agenda 2063 as an important milestone towards the ultimate goal of creating an African Common Market of nearly 1 billion people and the realization of an African Economic Community as envisaged in the Abuja Treaty and the Constitutive Act of the African Union. The CFTA also provides a strategic foundation for Africa’s effective integration into the global economy. Various analytical assessments of the CFTA have underscored its dynamic impact and benefits in terms of generating increased trade among African countries, stimulating industrialization, scale production and competitiveness, and infrastructure connectivity. The CFTA is not just about trade liberalization between African countries and regional economic communities, it is also an important pillar in the continent’s overall strategy for transformation.

Furthermore, at the global level, there is strong commitment to a new post-2015 development agenda which aims, among others, at eradicating extreme poverty by 2030. AU member states, through the Common African Position on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, have reaffirmed the need to implement “continental mechanisms to promote intra-African trade” in the context of Agenda 2063 “which presents the vision for the continent’s development”.¹

Against this backdrop, it can be affirmed that the stakes in the CFTA negotiations are exceedingly high. Failure of the CFTA negotiations will constitute a lost opportunity for Africa towards the realization of the post-2015 development agenda and Agenda 2063.

Objectives:

It is in this perspective that the ECA/ATPC and the AUC/DTI have planned to undertake this Side Event to refocus attention on the CFTA agenda and generate a momentum towards the negotiations expected to start in 2015 in accordance with the CFTA roadmap. In this regard, the Side Event will provide a platform to reemphasize the strategic importance and benefits of the CFTA, present the current state of play towards the launch of the negotiations in July 2015, and generate recommendations to address any lingering challenges in order to pave the way for a successful launch of the negotiations. The Side Event will thus also review and make recommendations to strengthen the institutional backstopping mechanisms for the CFTA negotiations including the specific roles of the ECA/ATPC and AUC/DTI in that regard.

Target audience:

- Delegates participating in the Conference of Ministers
- Representatives from African Regional Economic Communities
- Selected representatives from Ministries of Trade

Venue and date:

Addis Ababa, United Nations Conference Centre (UNCC), Conference Room 3
Saturday 28 March, 2015, from 4:45pm to 6:45pm

For further information, please contact:

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¹ African Union, *Common African Position on the Post-2015 Development Agenda* (Addis Ababa: AUC), p.27, 25.