**Validation Workshop on the Zimbabwe National AfCFTA Strategy**

**2nd to 3rd October 2019**

**Harare, Zimbabwe**

**Speaking Notes - AU DTI Representative – Opening Session**

By Beatrice Claudia Chaytor – AU Representative

**The Permanent Secretary for Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Diaspora, Mrs P. T. Musaka**

**Honourable Members of the Zimbabwean Parliament**

**Representative of UNECA, Mr Batanai Chikwene**

**Representative of the Zimbabwe Private Sector , Mr Tamuka Macheka**

**The Representative of the European Delegation**

**Distinguished colleagues**

**Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is my honour to be with you all at this validation workshop on the Zimbabwe National Strategy on the AfCFTA. I bring you greetings from the Commissioner of Trade and Industry, H. E. Albert Muchanga and our Ag. Director of Trade and Industry, Mr Hassan Hussein, and their warm wishes for a successful workshop on this very important topic. On behalf of the Commissioner and the Director, I would like to extend grateful thanks to the Zimbabwe Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade and the UN Economic Commission for Africa for organizing and hosting this valuable workshop and for the continued partnership between our respective organisations on the AfCFTA process.

Transformative is the word most commonly used when people refer to the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). As you all know, a major aim of the AfCFTA is the expansion of intra-African trade by lowering trade barriers to goods and services, as well as the movement of people throughout the continent. The AfCFTA is thus intended to be a key driver of integration, production and industrialisation, employment creation, income generation and poverty reduction. In effect it is the first of its kind because as this mega trade arrangement will bring fifty-five (55) African countries and eight (8) RECs together, to create a single continental market, with a population of more than a billion people and a combined GDP of USD1.2 trillion.

The AfCFTA will bring together hitherto fragmented and small markets into one large internal market, offering economies of scale and competitiveness to producers and exporters, in addition to attracting large-scale and long-term investments. Seen in this light, the AfCFTA is a source of poverty reduction, harnessing of the demographic dividend, and prosperity for the people of Africa. So far, the Agreement has been signed by 54 out of 55 African states, and has been ratified by 27 AU States. The entry into force of the Agreement on 30th May 2019 took place in record time – this had never happened in the history of the AU.

This workshop to validate the findings of the Zimbabwe national strategy on AfCFTA is a direct response by the government of Zimbabwe to obtain the best possible outcome from the Agreement, which bodes well for the successful implementation by Zimbabwe of the AfCFTA. To succeed, one has to plan well, and Zimbabwe has started to plan well for success in the AfCFTA. This national strategy provides pointers for the way in which Zimbabwe public and private sectors can make use of the AfCFTA for the benefit of the businesses and the people of Zimbabwe.

It is important to remember that the long term goal of the AfCFTA agreement is to drastically increase intra-African trade. Cross-border trade should become simpler and cheaper, and small and medium-sized enterprises in particular should benefit from the single market. How do we achieve this? By the time of its launch in July 2019, the African Continental Free Trade Area already had fairly well-defined rules of origin (at least 90 percent of which were already completed), a mechanism for secure exchange of offers on tariff concessions on trade in goods, an online continental monitoring mechanism for non tariff measures, a pan-African digital payments and settlement system as well as an African Trade Observatory portal. All these tools and initiatives will be useful to Zimbabwe as it seeks to implement the action plan it has set of for its national strategy on implementing the AfCFTA, and ensure that the 6 strategic objectives are well executed. In this respect, the steps that Zimbabwe has already made to improve the business environment, reflected in its progress in the World Bank Doing Business ranking are crucially important to ensuring that it takes advantage of the opportunities in the AfCFTA.

Establishing the single market is a process. These initial steps being taken to ensure full and smooth implementation of the AfCFTA Agreement will be gradually amplified over a period of several years and decades. As the process of operationalising the African free trade area gets underway, a standardised quality regime for Africa will be established, trade in services will take place, starting with the first five priority sectors on business, communciation, financial, tourism and transport services; the African open skies programme under the Single Air Transport Market will be made effective; Africa will be inter-connected with efficient inter-country infrastructure, including for digital trade and e-commerce.

Three additional Protocols will complete the set of legal texts for the AfCFTA, namely: the Protocols on Invesment, Competition and Intellectual Property Rights, and it is hoped that these additional documents will be concluded by January 2021. As Zimbabwe has signalled, through the President, to become a regional logistics and transport hub for the continent, it must reflect on how it can make use of these the available continental tools and the provisions in the Agreement, through tariff and services commitments, and through regulatory cooperation with its trading partners.

The successful realisation of the AfCFTA also depends on the institutional structure to support implementation. With the AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government as its pinnacle, the organisational structure established for the implementation of the AfCFTA legal texts, including the Council of Ministers, Committee of Senior Trade Officials, the various Committees and Sub-Committees will be ably supported by the AfCFTA Secretariat, which will monitor and track implementation to ensure that it proceeds in a smooth manner. The AfCFTA Secretariat will be housed in Accra, Ghana. And the first meeting of the Council of Ministers and the Committee of Senior Trade Officials is expected to take place later in October. As a preface to that, the interim AfCFTA Secretariat which is being incubated in the Department of Trade and Industry of the AUC will be developing a framework of cooperation with the RECs that will serve as a platform for our continued joint work. This is important because the RECs are the building blocks for the AfCFTA.

The fact that the Zimbabwe national strategy also includes provision for an institutional mechanism underscores the understanding by the Zimbabwean government that the strategy will require consistent oversight and that coordination among both government institutions on the one hand and government and the private sector on the other hand. It is crucially important that the national AfCFTA committee is established and supported in this regard.

Over the next two days we will hear further detail about the content of the national strategy. We look forward to contributing to the refining of the strategy as its findings are validated by the stakeholders present. The AUC stands ready to continue to support Zimbabwe in its implementation efforts. We will continue to partner with UNECA in this support and look forward to taking forward the work that arises from the national implementation strategy.

Thank you for your attention.