**Welcome Remarks to the Validation Workshop of the AfCFTA National Strategy for Zimbabwe**

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**Harare, Zimbabwe**

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The Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade

The Representatives of the African Union Commission **Mrs Beatrice Chaytor**

The Representative of the Private Sector

The Representative of the European Union Delegation to Zimbabwe

Senior Government Officials,

Colleagues from the UN System and from other Development Partners,

Invited Guests,

Member of the Media, and

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to welcome you all to this validation workshop on the AfCFTA National Strategy for Zimbabwe. We started this journey in March this year with a Scoping Mission under the leadership of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. The scoping mission was followed by National Consultative Meeting on 19-20 June 2019. The National Forum was followed by intensive consultations across the broad spectrum of relevant stakeholders. All these processes gave us a lot of information on that was used in preparing the draft strategy that will be tabled for your consideration today. I am pleased that we have kept to our timelines to get the strategy ready.

This National Strategy that you are about to review and validate is a product of thorough research and consultation, and provide key and far reaching recommendations on the way forward for Zimbabwe in implementing the AfCFTA. The Strategy benefitted from, and complement major national policies and frameworks aimed at transforming the Zimbabwean economy and improving the lives of the people. These include the Vision 2030, the Transitional Stabilisation Programme, National Trade Policy, the National Industrial Development Policy, the National Export Strategy, and the National Local Content Strategy.

The success in implementing the National AfCFTA strategy depend on the implementation of the key policy documents on which the strategy is anchored. The strategy is also aligned to key regional initiatives such as the COMESA industrial cluster development programme and the SADC industrialization strategy and roadmap among others. Its major value added is in synthesizing all these frameworks and providing clear compass on how Zimbabwe can position herself to benefit from the continental market, what she needs to do, and how it should be done.

The Strategy provides a very useful context of Zimbabwe’s trade performance. Zimbabwe’s trade is concentrated in Southern Africa, with SADC accounting for 98 percent of imports and 99.3 percent of exports. While COMESA accounts for 12.8 percent of Africa imports and 3.7 percent of exports.

Within the SADC region 80% of Zimbabwe’s trade in both imports and exports is with South Africa. Other major export destinations include Zambia, Mozambique, Botswana and Kenya. For Zimbabwe, the AfCFTA opens up new market opportunities in Africa beyond SADC and COMESA which are the traditional destinations and sources of exports and imports. It is time for the Private Sector to look beyond Zimbabwe’s neighbouring countries and explore trade and investment opportunities in the rest of continent in both trade in goods and trade in services.

The draft identifies six strategic objectives as follows;

1. *To develop a cohesive and efficient common national approach to continental and regional integration;*
2. *To expand exports of goods and services and widen access into African markets;*
3. *To enhance Trade facilitation and the business environment;*
4. *Enhancing infrastructure development to facilitate border connectivity and access to markets;*
5. *Targeted upgrading of human resources and institutional capacities;*
6. *To empower women and youth in both the formal and informal sectors.*

Over the next two days, let us look at the proposed strategies and interventions and see if they adequately respond to what Zimbabwe needs to do in order to benefit from the AfCFTA. We need to critically examine the Action Plan for implementing the AfCFTA to ensure no critical components have been left out. Your insights and inputs in improving the Action Plan are very welcome and we look forward to receiving them.

Zimbabwe’s National AfCFTA implementation Strategy for Zimbabwe like another policy documents will not implement itself. We have to invest heavily in execution and implementation. The government will have to provide an environment in which exporters and importers can do business and set up firms that can compete globally. The importance of ensuring coherence among fiscal policies, monetary policies, industrial policies and trade promotion initiatives is critical and cannot be overemphasised. The ongoing efforts to implement key economic reforms are a step in the right direction and should be commended. And, results from such efforts are beginning show.

It is in this vain that I would like to congratulate Zimbabwe for featuring in the Top-20 improvers in Doing Business 2020. Zimbabwe made regulatory improvements in five areas measured by Doing Business. Starting a business is now easier than it was a few years ago, business licensing fee payable to the City of Harare have been reduced, the approval of construction permits by the City of Harare is now faster, the deed office now has an internal tracking system for property transfer process and there are improvements in company reorganization procedures significantly facilitating insolvency proceedings. As tariffs go down in the African single market, these are the kind of reforms that will give Zimbabwean operators an urge as they compete globally.

To the private sector the message is simple, the government of Zimbabwe has joined other african countries in creating a market of over 1,2 billion people and 55 countries with a combined GDP of over US$ 2.5 trillion. It’s now up to the private sector to embrace this great initiative and play to win. The goods you export to other african countries will have to compete with products from all over the world, it is therefore critical that you build globally competitive firms.

It is refreshing to note that the expectations of Government on the role that the private sector will play in the implementation of the AfCFTA are clear. In his State of the Nation Address yesterday, His Excellency the president, Cde. Mnangagwa said ***“in partnership with the private sector, we envisage to derive maximum benefit from the operationalisation of African Continental Free Trade Area”.*** This is a clear demonstration of government’s political will to implement the agreement. The ball is now in the private sector court.

The effective implementation of the AfCFTA implementation strategy will require government, the private sector and other trade support institutions to work together. In this regard, the capacity of Zimbabwe’s trade support institutions must be strengthened so that operators in the trade sector have all the necessary support they need to succeed in foreign markets.

All the actors involved in the implementation of the Strategy must pull in the same direction. This is why we believe that the proposal by the private sector for the creation of a formal platform in the form of the AfCFTA National Implementation Committee is critical and must be supported. The Committee should bring together all the key stakeholders together to coordinate the efforts of key stakeholders in a structured manner. The proposed Committee should work with existing structures and not result in duplication of efforts.

As we discuss the strategy I would like to urge all stakeholders to think critically on how we can increase the participation of woman and youth in the trade sector. Do not hesitate to make proposals that will strengthen the document and result in the impact that we are all looking for.

The Strategy once adopted should be implemented in a dynamic way and should be aligned with other national strategies. To a larger extent, some of the actions that will be required to take advantage of the scope that exists for Zimbabwe to become a regional transport and logistics hub as outlined by the His Excellency, Cde. Mnangagwa in his State of the Nation Address yesterday lie squarely within the realm of trade policy. The approach the country will take in scheduling the commitments in some of priority sectors that have been identified under the AfCFTA Trade in services negotiations can help Zimbabwe became a regional and Transport Hub.

Let me assure you of ECA’ s continued technical support, working with the African Union Commission in assisting Zimbabwe in its efforts to develop a national strategy to benefit from the AfCFTA. In the region, the ECA is also supporting Malawi and Zambia to develop their National AfCFTA Strategies. The ECA through the UN system in Zimbabwe will also continue to support the Government of Government in its economic transformation and development agenda. We are willing and prepared to support the government and people of Zimbabwe in their economic development process.

In closing, I would like to thank the Consultants who worked on the National Strategy, the officials of the Ministry Foreign Affairs and International Trade who worked in organising this Validation workshop.

Also, let me recognise other partners who have contributed to the AfCFTA process- AUC- leading the initiative; UNCTAD.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge and thank the European Union for their support for the AfCFTA project. We are indeed grateful.

We should not make this National Strategy ‘another document’. Let us move into the implementation mode and change Zimbabwe’s circumstances through trade.

I thank you for your kind attention.