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## **“The CFTA We Want”**

### African Civil Society Demands at Africa Trade Week

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia – African civil society organisations ask that space be created for citizens, workers, farmers, traders, producers, enterprises, civil society, private sector to participate effectively in negotiations toward a Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) and to ensure the reflection of their concerns and views. They also made the following demands after discussing the challenges of Africa’s economic transformation and integration and role of the CFTA from 26 to 27 November 2016 in Addis Ababa under the umbrella of the Africa Trade Network.

Information on the CFTA processes must be made available in a timely and accessible manner to citizens to enable their input and effective participation at national, regional, and continental levels.

The emerging focus of the CFTA on across the board tariff elimination and deregulation of services must be counter-balanced with more attention to industrial and other policies to build domestic productive capacity.

Rather than fast-tracking the CFTA on its own, there must be proper sequencing of any liberalisation measures with constructive policies to strengthen productive capabilities in African economies, build domestic enterprise and promote the rights and social protection of workers, farmers, traders, women and all other citizens.

African civil society organizations are deeply concerned that the predominant focus of the CFTA is on ambitious and aggressive elimination of tariffs and deregulation of services, with little regard for the different needs and capacities of different countries and socio-economic constituencies in Africa. They further noted that the work programme on modalities for negotiations had not been concluded yet there is an attempt to introduce a text of the entire agreement. A proper approach would be to conduct impact assessments which would have been the basis of negotiating a text. Furthermore, this focus of tariff and regulatory restrictions appears to be at the expense of any serious efforts to co-ordinate and integrate even the other minimal measures related to productive capacity, infrastructure, etc., that was identified as part the programme of Boosting Intra-African Trade that was adopted as a necessary counterpart in the launch of the CFTA.

African civil society organizations noted that African Heads of State launched the CFTA in the context of continuing and worsening crises in the global economy, which have played havoc with the lives of ordinary people in Africa and the world over. These crises have served to highlight once again the untenable situation of African countries due to their subordination in the global economy as primary commodity export dependent economies – a situation inherited from their colonial past but reinforced by decades of the application of neoliberal free market policies. The CFTA was meant to contribute to put an end to this situation, i.e., to be an instrument for the transformation and integration of Africa’s economies, and should be driven by and meet the needs and aspirations of all their peoples. The civil society organisations are worried that as it is currently proceeding the CFTA would rather undermine these aspirations.

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