

AFRICAN UNION

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Creating One African Market

Draft Concept Note

Civil Society Forum at the Niamey Extraordinary Summit

***“Enhancing Civil Society Engagement in the
AfCFTA to Broaden Inclusiveness”***

3 July 2019, Niamey, Niger

Introduction

At the 32nd Ordinary Session of the Assembly held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on 10 and 11 February 2019, AU Heads of State and Government decided to hold an Extra-Ordinary Summit in July 2019, a day before the Coordination Meeting, in Niamey, Niger in order to make it possible for the full membership of the African Union to celebrate the first Anniversary of the Signing of the Agreement Establishing the AfCFTA, formally launch the operational phase; and decide on the location and structure of the AfCFTA Secretariat.

This ties in with the decision taken at their 31st Ordinary Summit held on 1-2 July 2018 in Nouakchott, Mauritania, by the African Union Heads of State and Government, to *“undertake broad-based national awareness campaigns so that all stakeholders such as ordinary citizens and business people across Africa embrace the AfCFTA”*. They also mandated the African Union Commission to *“organize a Civil Society Forum and a Private Sector Forum preceding the July 2019 Summit in Niamey, Niger in order to enhance stakeholder engagement on the implementation of the AfCFTA”*.

It is against this background that the African Union Commission is organising a Civil Society Forum in Niamey, Niger, on 3rd July 2019, alongside the commemorations of the entry into force of the AfCFTA, as per the above Summit Decisions.

The AfCFTA Agreement will enter into force imminently since so far, 52¹ out of 55 AU Member States have signed the Agreement and 22 Member States have deposited instruments of ratification with the African Union Commission. This is the minimum number of ratifications required for the Agreement to enter into force. With the current momentum, it is obvious that the July Summit will be another significant milestone in the annals of the history of the AfCFTA since the signing of the Agreement in Kigali, Rwanda in March 2018.

The African Union Boosting Intra-Africa Trade (BIAT) Action Plan and the AfCFTA are landmark initiatives which have the potential to bring sustainable transformative change in Africa by promoting regional trade, and assisting AU Member States to achieve robust economic growth and sustainable development, leading ultimately to the realisation of the aspirations of African people contained in *Agenda 2063 The Africa We Want*.

The AUC Department of Trade and Industry organised the first annual AfCFTA Stakeholders Forum in Dakar in November 2018 where a good representation of African

¹ Benin, Eritrea and Nigeria have not yet signed the Agreement Establishing the AfCFTA

Stakeholders took part and committed to engage Member States in taking action for ratification and implementation of the AfCFTA. Prior to that, the Department took the opportunity to dialogue with African Civil Society through a number of smaller meetings hosted by civil society organisations or the DTI itself. All these dialogues have proved useful in obtaining feedback and views of a diverse range of civil society organisations (CSOs).

1. Objective

The purpose of the Civil Society Forum is to enhance stakeholder engagement on the implementation of the AfCFTA. The Forum is expected to achieve the following:

- Impart knowledge to all stakeholders on the priority trade issues of the AfCFTA;
- Establish a foundation for regular information flow on trade issues to key stakeholders;
- Improve co-ordination between civil society organisations and relevant government ministries and agencies on issues related to the AfCFTA;
- Increase participation opportunities for civil society stakeholders in the work programme of the AfCFTA; and
- Strengthen the culture of dialogue and inclusiveness.

2. Expected outputs

The expected outputs are:

- Improved understanding among the general public about the AfCFTA, and the requirements for its successful implementation; and
- Increased stakeholders' participation in national, regional and international trade policy formulation, negotiations, and implementation required for the successful operationalisation of the AfCFTA.

3. Participants

The Civil Society Forum will attract 100 participants to be drawn from African CSOs, CSO umbrella organisations on trade, and members of the AU ECOSOC, among others. The selection of participants will consider equitable geographical representation of the African Union, women and youth.