

**Opening Ceremony of the African Continent Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)
on Friday 6 March 2020 at 09:30 hrs at Hennessy Park Hotel**

Mr Denise A.O. KODHE, Presiding Officer, AU-ECOSOCC

Mr Prudence SEBAHISI, Head of the AfCFTA Secretariat

Mr. Charles CARTIER, Chairman of the EDB, Mauritius

**Mr Christna Rao APPADOO, Incoming Chapter Chair, ECOSOCC-
Mauritius**

**Mr Fredrick MATWANG'A, Deputy Director, Economic Affairs &
Commercial Diplomacy Directorate in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.**

Mr Vinesh CHINTARAM, Chairperson, AfCFTA Workshop Mauritius 2020

Members of the Diplomatic Corps

Non State Actors

All the Delegates and participants

Ladies & Gentlemen

1. It gives me great pleasure to be among you this morning. Being in the midst of members of the private and public sectors and members of the Civil Society, reflects the importance of unlocking the potentials of the African Continental Trade Agreement (AfCFTA). We have been given yet another tool for strengthening the South - South cooperation.
2. I have no doubt that at the end of the day this workshop will have examined the challenges facing Africa, and propose meaningful measures for African countries to partner and speak with one voice on issues concerning the prosperity of the whole African Continent.
3. It is precisely in that context that the National ECOSOCC Chapter of Mauritius needs to be praised for the initiative of holding this workshop today. A special welcome to Mr. Denise O.Khode and officials from AfCFTA Secretariat, ECOSOCC and the other foreign delegates. I hope you will be able to spare the time to visit our island.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

4. With all Africa having signed the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) and 29 countries having ratified it (as of January 2020), the region is now implementing a single continental market for goods and services and laying the foundations for the establishment of a continental customs union.

5. AfCFTA is looked upon as an investment, economic diversification, and job creation blueprint that will shape the future of Africa in the years to come, help meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) by 2030, and consolidate progress toward the African Union's Agenda 2063.

6. The current trade tensions among the United States, China, and others loom large on the global agenda. Moreover, a synchronized slowdown of the world economy, underpinned by Brexit and a weak Euro area, would lower world demand. I do not have to stress the ill effect of the world calamity, the Coronavirus, will have on the world's trade. These challenges portend a difficult external environment and underscore the importance of the AfCFTA.

7. Though intra-African trade has been increasing slightly, it remains substantially below optimal levels, and intracontinental trade is still very low compared to the rest of the world.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

8. Through this decade, the Continent is expected to continue to be home to seven of the world's 10 fastest-growing economies.

9. With business environments improving, regional integration centred around the African Continental Free Trade Agreement progressing, and the transformational technologies of Fourth Industrial Revolution spreading, the region is primed for trade, investment, and mutually beneficial partnerships.
10. The recent, unprecedented interest of an increasingly diversified group of external partners for engagement with Africa highlights this potential.
11. Despite the continent's promise, though, obstacles to success linger, as job creation still has not caught up with the growing youth labour force, gaps in good and inclusive governance remain, and climate change as well as state fragility threaten to reverse the hard-fought-for gains of recent decade
12. Progress in implementing SDGs has been uneven both across countries and across goals, often hindered by a lack of coordination across national and local governments as well as the global system at large.
13. Financing continues to be the biggest hindrance to global success. Resource mobilization strategies that can push Africa over the finish line have to be explored.
14. With rapid population growth and urbanization, African leaders must fashion and implement policies to encourage job creation and maintain service delivery. Strategies have to be devised for governments to invest in sectors primed to grow and create jobs, prepare young people for the jobs of the future, and improve the quality of living in Africa's rapidly growing cities.

15. Overshadowing all of these challenges is the threat of climate change. Food security is particularly in the cross line as climate change threatens means of production and the nutrition of the continent's people.
16. Many leaders see the Fourth Industrial Revolution and its accompanying technologies as a pathway for many solutions to the challenges facing the Continent.
17. Progress toward goals such as education access, climate change mitigation, and service delivery can all be enhanced by digital tools both already available and on the horizon. Artificial intelligence can, hand-in-hand with enabling and empowering policies, improve business, health care, and the livelihoods of all.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

18. Bolstered by the newly implemented African Continental Free Trade Agreement, policies to encourage innovation and integration can propel the Continent into new frontiers of business and human development.
19. For Africa to realize the full potential of the AfCFTA it will have to put in place policies that encourage Research and Development, and protect innovation by both residents and non-residents alike, but with a sharper focus on domestic innovation due to its young, dynamic, and increasingly educated population.
20. Furthermore new technology platforms are developing across the continent. In 2018, Africa's services sector accounted for over 52 percent of Africa's GDP—largely boosted by the booming digital sector. These technologies are empowering new small and medium entrepreneurs,

creating jobs, diversifying economies, improving productivity, and facilitating entry into new markets.

21.The AfCFTA can provide the vehicle for going to scale through a pooled African market, while ensuring that these innovations are adequately protected, a move that requires innovation registration to be standardized across markets.

22.To make the most of intra-african trade, patents and technology, we would have to accelerate research and development in universities. Furthermore we need to support innovation, education, especially higher education for both boys and girls, relative to science and the 4th Industrial Generation oriented subjects.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

23.Nothing would stop the AfCFTA from becoming a reality. With the economic integration of the continent's 54 countries, this would mean a market of over 1.3 billion people and a combined GDP of US\$6.36 trillion.

24.Mauritius has long been an advocate for developing economic bridges between itself and other African states, leveraging its position as one of Africa's best place to conduct business. Being relatively small and manageable we have been able in the past 50 years to enter into meaningful Treaties with Asia and Europe for the benefit of users within Africa .

25.Ladies and gentlemen, AfCFTA, with all its advantages for the Continent, has taken a good start for a successful implementation. There will be, of course, some hurdles along the way but together we can always find solutions.

26.In this connection, we must recognise the contribution of ECOSOCC which has an important role to play in the effective translation of the objectives, principles and policies into concrete programmes.

27. YES WE CAN

28.Before concluding I would like to express my appreciation that this workshop will focus on three areas which are important, I may even say the “*sine qua non*”, for unlocking the potentials of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA).

29.I have now the great pleasure and honour to declare this Workshop open, wishing you success in your discussions and deliberations.