

AFRICAN TRADE EXPERTS AIM TO REVITALISE WORLD TRADE TALKS

Addis Ababa, 24 November 2004 (ECA) – A "High-Level Brainstorming Meeting" for African trade negotiators and officials opens Thursday morning in Tunis, Tunisia, to discuss ways to revitalize world trade negotiations and restore development goals to the heart of the World Trade Organisation's Doha Round.

The meeting will be opened by the Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Africa, K.Y. Amoako. He is expected to call for greater commitment from international leaders to ensure that international trade agreements are supportive of African development.

The two-day meeting is expected to review the WTO's recently approved "July Package", intended to advance the talks that stalled in Cancun, Mexico, last year.

Sessions have been planned to help African countries develop and refine their negotiation strategies; identify negotiation areas of key interest to Africa; develop suggestions on modalities for agriculture and non-agricultural market access (NAMA); and map out a strategy for future negotiations. By the end of the week, participants aim to have agreed a road map for moving the Doha process forward while safeguarding African interests.

The meeting is organised by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), in collaboration with the African Development Bank, the African Union, UNDP and other UN partners.

Earlier this week, African trade experts gathered in Tunis for discussions ahead of the "Brainstorming Meeting".

Mr. Shaledine Makhoulf, Secretary of State in the Tunisian Ministry of Commerce, opened the meeting saying Africa's strategy for achieving greater market access should focus on reducing tariff peaks and tariff escalations in rich country markets; and examine ways of preserving existing trade preference agreements with developed countries.

The Ad-Hoc Expert Group meeting aimed to enhance the negotiating capacity of African trade negotiators trying to win access to developed-country markets for African products.

Experts analyzed key propositions in the Doha Round and their implications for African exports. They also discussed technical aspects of formulae being proposed in negotiations on agricultural and non-agricultural market access and non-tariff barriers to trade.

The participants made recommendations on the best formulae for African countries to adopt for the negotiations, given the agreements already concluded in the July Package. They will be discussed in sessions on Thursday and Friday.

In his opening remarks to the Ad-Hoc Experts Group, Hakim Ben Hammouda, Director of ECA's Trade and Regional Integration, said WTO members should honour promises in the Doha Development Agenda to grant African countries special and differential treatment, to allow African countries to use generic drugs to combat public health emergencies and to remove agricultural subsidies and other forms of distortion in industrial countries. (ENDS)

More information is available on the ECA website at

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