

Towards a Continental Free Trade Area and Customs Union in Africa – 7th session of the Committee on Trade, Regional Cooperation and Integration aims to shape debate for African Union Summit 2012

ECA Press Release No. 83/2011

Addis Ababa, 23 May 2011 (ECA) - The 7th session of the Committee on Trade, Regional Cooperation and Integration (CTRCI) will take place on 2-3 June 2011 at the Headquarters of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. More than 150 participants are expected to attend the meeting to discuss the theme “***Towards an accelerated Continental Free Trade Area and Customs Union in Africa***” and will examine ways and means of fast-tracking the process.

According to ECA's Information and Communication Service, the session has the objective to discuss policy actions and measures and to help shape the debate and preparations towards the African Union Summit in January 2012.

“The event is taking place at a time of renewed enthusiasm for accelerating the establishment of a continental free trade area in order to achieve an African Common Market”, says Joseph Atta-Mensah, Director of the Regional Integration, Infrastructure and Trade Division at ECA. “The Continental Free Trade area would be a big step towards a Continental Customs Union and would deepen Africa's integration, provide greater mobility of goods and services, investments and men and women across the continent.”

The meeting will take stock of progress in Africa's regional integration, and developments in infrastructure and natural resources sectors. The attendees will also look into developments taking place in the international trade arena, with particular emphasis on the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), Aid-for-Trade, and WTO negotiations, as all of these global issues have a bearing on Africa's integration agendas.

Several reports will be presented, for example on Progress in Regional Integration in Africa, on Progress in Regional Integration in Africa and on Progress Achieved in Intra-African trade. Furthermore, the Almaty Programme of Action, which was adopted in 2003, will be reviewed by a Representative of the ECA secretariat. The programme addresses the special needs of Landlocked Developing Countries within a New Global Framework for Transit Transport Cooperation

The meeting will be preceded by an Ad-Hoc Expert Group meeting/Workshop on the establishment of inter-REC Free Trade Areas (FTAs) and harmonization of FTA regimes among the RECs from 31 May to 1 June 2011.

Participants include senior Officials such as Permanent Secretaries and experts from African ministries, African Ambassadors and Plenipotentiaries based in Addis Ababa, Representatives from the AU and NEPAD, Representatives from civil society organizations including the private sector, and from the African Development Bank, the African Economic Research Consortium (AERC), UN system organizations, the World Bank and other institutional and development partners.

Ends.

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