

# African Ambassadors call for accelerated implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area and the Single African Air Transport Market

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Dakar, 25 May 2023 - The African Institute for Economic Development and Planning, in collaboration with the ambassadors of the African group of the diplomatic corps accredited to Senegal, organized a High-level round table on «The status, challenges and prospects of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM)» on Wednesday 24 May 2023.

This round table is a IDEP contribution to the celebration of Africa Day, celebrated on May 25, and that coincides this year with the celebration of the sixtieth anniversary of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), now the African Union (AU), under the slogan "Our Africa, Our Future". It is also during this year 2023 that UNIDEP celebrates its 60th anniversary.

This year, the theme chosen is in line with the African Union's 2023 theme of "The Year of the AfCFTA: Accelerating the Implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area". The theme aims to generate greater political commitment to trade as a development agenda for Africa. It will serve to mobilize solutions and solidarity to turn this vision into reality, with a view to building linkages with member states, AU organs, private sector actors, development partners and other stakeholders, who have important roles to play in accelerating the implementation of the AfCFTA.

“Both projects, AfCFTA and SAATM, are linked and reinforced each other. The AfCFTA has amongst other specific objectives to contribute to the movement of capital and people and facilitate investments. An effective functioning of the SAATM, on its turn, would allow residents of the region gain in comfort and choice of airlines, reduced flight times,

business opportunities, and strengthened cultural ties through the progressive development of business and leisure tourism” highlighted Karima Bounemra Ben Soltane, IDEP Director.

Aminata Maiga, Resident Coordinator of the United Nations in Senegal saluted the ongoing collaboration between IDEP and the African Group of Ambassadors. She further stated that “the objectives of the African Union are in line with the Sustainable Development Goals. The successful implementation of the AfCFTA requires close coordination between the United Nations, the African Union and countries to ensure beneficial and sustainable trade policies”. She concluded that “The United Nations will continue to stand with the peoples, nations, and regional and continental organizations of continent to build a prosperous Africa”.

“It is unimaginable that we continue to have these great difficulties in moving from one capital to another in Africa. There is extraordinary work being done at the African Union and it is time for diplomats to take ownership of the AfCFTA and the SAATM, two closely related and fundamental issues for our continent”, said H. E. Michel Régis Onanga Mamadou Ndiaye, Ambassador of the Republic of Gabon, Dean of the Africa group of Ambassadors in Senegal.

The seminar saw the communications by H. E. Wamkele Mene, Secretary General of AfCFTA Secretariat; Angeline Simana, Director of Air Transport of the African Civil Aviation Commission (AFCAC); Prosper Zo’o Minto’o, Regional Director for West and Central Africa of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO); and Jason MC Cormack, Economic Affairs Officer at the ECA.

“There are many obstacles but the AfCFTA offers opportunities towards the creation of a single market in Africa. We have established three protocols on investment, competition and intellectual property which are pillars in the implementation and all of this would not be possible without the partners who are committed to supporting the AfCFTA so that we go beyond the trade agreements,” said H. E. Wamkele Mene, Secretary General of AfCFTA Secretariat.

The AfCFTA and the SAATM are two of the 12 flagship projects of Agenda 2063 and there are in line with the historic Abuja Treaty establishing the African Economic Community. The AfCFTA agreement entered into force in 2019 and implementation began in 2021. the Declaration on the Establishment of a SAATM was adopted in January 2015 and was officially launched in January 2018.

The objective of the AfCFTA is to create a single continental market for goods and services, with free movement of people and investment opportunities, while improving competitiveness and supporting economic transformation. The AfCFTA represents effective progress in terms of regional integration, industrialization, development of trade and structural transformation in the continent.

The AfCFTA is expected to increase intra-African trade in transport services by nearly 50 percent, according to recent estimates by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). It is reported that with an AfCFTA, in absolute terms, more than 25 percent of Africa's trade gains in intra-African trade services would go to transport alone; and nearly 40 percent of the increase in services output in Africa would be in transport.

Like the AfCFTA, SAATM, is said to be full of several benefits that can enhance connectivity between states and between regions. According to the International Air Transport Association (IATA), to date, 34 countries have joined SAATM, representing 80% of the existing aviation market in Africa.

In addition to the expected 27% increase in frequencies on existing air routes, SAATM would allow for economies of scale of about \$500 million in passenger fares, free competition, the opening of new commercial routes and environmental protection, and the development of the private sector in civil aviation.

For IDEP and the diplomats of its member States, this round table which brought together high-level officials, political decision-makers, researchers and representatives of international organizations was an annual opportunity to reflect on the issues and challenges facing our continent in terms of development.

At the end of the exchanges, the ambassadors called on the countries to show more commitment to remove the existing barriers in the implementation of the two projects. A regional approach is needed to raise awareness and support non-performing states. The role of the private sector and civil society was highlighted as necessary for the acceleration of the implementation of the AfCFTA and SAATM.

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