

George Lipimile, Chairman of the tralac board and CEO of the COMESA
Competition Commission

2018 tralac Annual Conference

Opening Remarks

.....Protocol greeting...

We are meeting today for the 2018 Annual Conference of the Trade Law Centre (tralac), following the Extra-ordinary Summit of the African Union Heads of State and Government, which took place yesterday, here is Kigali. Member States of the African Union convened to sign the African Continental Free Trade Area. This marks an important milestone for African integration and for Africa. The objectives of the AfCFTA are a single continental market for goods and services with the free movement of business persons and investment, to expand of intra-Africa trade and improve the competitiveness of industries and enterprises. But ultimately the aim is to contribute to improve the quality of life of all Africans, to support inclusive growth and sustainable development.

Tralac has been working on African trade and integration since its establishment, and specifically on the AfCFTA since AU Member States agreed in January 2012 to create this continental free trade

area. Tralac's work has covered the broad AfCFTA agenda, including matters related to trade in goods, trade in services, intellectual property, investment and competition policy. An assessment of the impact that the AfCFTA could have, using a GTAP analysis, emphasized that no-tariff barriers are indeed pernicious barriers to intra-Africa trade and investment. Modeling results indicated that a 20% improvement in transit time (taking into account transport and customs and border procedures) would contribute more to enhance intra-Africa trade than complete elimination of tariffs. This does not mean that tariffs are not important at all; there are still tariff barriers on specific goods, including agricultural products, that impede trade amongst our African nations. Related issues such as rules of origin are also still important non-tariff barriers for certain goods.

tralac's work on the AfCFTA has also focused specifically on trade in services. Services play an increasingly important role in all our economies, and we recognise it is not possible to be competitive in manufacturing without competitively priced, and reliable supply of these services. Services are also an important aspect of trade facilitation. Access to services such as education, health care, transport and financial services, are essential for effective participation in the 21st century economy. They are also essential to improve the wellbeing of our citizens.

tralac's work with the African Union Commission on the AfCFTA has been a very important component of the tralac work programme since 2013. It has included studies on the status of integration in the regional economic communities, the impact of tariff liberalization, options for the modalities for trade in services and many other important substantive issues. The engagement with colleagues at the Department of Trade and Industry has been very important to keep tralac informed of key developments related to the AfCFTA and related developments. This partnership has helped to ensure that tralac's work is relevant and focuses on the issues that matter for Africa's trade, integration and development agenda. tralac has been honoured by the participation of the Commissioners of Trade and Industry (the current Commissioner HE Albert Muchanga and his predecessor HE Fatima Acyl), the Director of Trade and Industry, Ms Treasure Maphanga, and many colleagues of the Department of Trade and Industry at previous Annual Conferences and other events (such as the Trade and Development Symposium at the Bali Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation, at which the Trade Facilitation Agreement was concluded). This is a partnership that tralac values and appreciates very much. Tralac is committed to support the process that follows the Extra-ordinary Summit; as the ongoing work programme for phase 1 of the negotiations continues and the second phase of the negotiations gets under way.

While the Extra-ordinary Summit marks an important milestone for Africa; much remains to be done to achieve an Africa that provides opportunities for all its citizens; women, youth and children, men, farmers, investors, workers and entrepreneurs. Africa has an important opportunity to claim the 21st century; the AfCFTA is an important step in the right direction. But much work lies ahead to achieve the dream of a prosperous Africa for all.

It is my great pleasure to welcome you all to the 2018 tralac Annual Conference. We look forward to your active participation to make this an important contribution to this journey.