

## **OPENING REMARKS by George Lipimile, Chair of the tralac Board of Directors**

**Distinguished Members of the Board of the Trade Law Centre (tralac), tralac Associates and our Alumni networks across Africa,**

**The Honourable Minister for Trade and Industry from Ghana, Mr. Alan Kyerematen,**

**The Right Honourable Judges of the COMESA Court of Justice,**

**His Excellency Albert Muchanga, Commissioner for Trade and Industry, African Union Commission**

**His Excellency Wamkele Mene, Secretary General of the African Continental Free Trade Area**

**His Excellency Ambassador Alan Wolff, Deputy-Director General, World Trade Organisation,**

**tralac's Women in Trade Governance Network members**

### **Distinguished Participants,**

It is my pleasure to welcome you to tralac's 2020 Annual Conference, under the theme 'Trade Governance in Africa midst a Pandemic and other Global Challenges'. We are deeply honoured and humbled by the presence and participation of the Hon. Minister for Trade and Industry Mr. Alan Kyerematen, His Excellency Ambassador albert Muchanga, and His Excellency Ambassador Wamkele Mene ,in our Conference today.

And of further importance, allow me to extend our thanks to our development partners without whom this Conference would not be possible – GIZ, Sida (Sweden) and USAID.

We also acknowledge our collaboration with the African Union Commission which predates the launch of the negotiations of the African Continental Free Trade Area – and we were honoured to have participated in the Inaugural Africa Integration Day where tralac was given the opportunity to share its perspective on lessons from COVID-19 for Africa's trade facilitation agenda.

In recent years we have taken tralac's flagship event to the region, hosting the Annual Conference in Zambia, Namibia, and in Rwanda on the day after the Extraordinary Summit at which the African Continental Free Trade Area was adopted by the Members of the African Union, and the Agreement was opened for signature and ratification, and last year in Kenya.

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

We meet at a time of crises:

Firstly, the global COVID-19 pandemic

The pandemic has impacted us all and has brought economic activity to a near-standstill in many countries as they impose tight restrictions to contain the spread of the virus. According to a June 2020 report by the World Bank, most countries are expected to face a recession in 2020. This is bad news for us as developing countries. The measures adopted by Governments, while undoubtedly necessary to save human lives, have also unfortunately reversed years of progress on important economic and social goals. The lockdowns and restrictions of travel beyond borders has sadly impacted on the speed of market integration on the continent. Tralac has devoted much resources to collect, curate and analyse the impact of the pandemic, and the specific measures that countries are adopting to curb its spread and its impact on Africa's trade. In today's session, our esteemed panelists will discuss the lessons learnt from COVID-19 and what needs to be done to facilitate trade in Africa.

Secondly, it is the crisis in multilateral trade governance/WTO

As you may be aware, the Appellate Body of the WTO has not been functional since December 2019 and no new appointments have been made. It is clear that reform, transformation and a new formula are necessary; our attention is now focused on Geneva as we monitor the process of appointing a new Director General. With three African candidates in the running – we have a specific and important interest, in this process. In the second session of this conference, His Excellency Ambassador Alan Wolff, who is the Deputy-Director General of the World Trade Organisation, will take us on a journey of what the future of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) could look like and what reforms are required to enhance the effectiveness of multilateral trade agreements and organisations.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Despite the crisis, African countries are continuing negotiations on the outstanding issues necessary for trade under the African Continental Free Trade Area to begin. COVID-19 has disrupted the processes – but not derailed them. The aim is to start trade under the new regime by 1<sup>st</sup> January 2021. The timeline is tight, and much remains to be done. In tomorrow's sessions, we will provide an update on the status of negotiations in the context of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement, institutional arrangements and the impact on Africa's global trade relations. We will also explore the desired outcomes from the African Continental Free Trade Area and the tools and commitments required to achieve these outcomes.

It is our sincere hope that this Conference will contribute towards progressing the African Continental Free Trade Area agenda.

On this note, I am pleased to introduce and welcome His Excellency Albert Muchanga, Commissioner for Trade and Industry, African Union Commission, who will deliver his keynote address this afternoon.

H.E. Ambassador Albert Mudenda Muchanga is well known to all of us. He is currently African Union Commissioner for Trade and Industry. He previously worked in the Zambian Civil Service at home and abroad and as Deputy Executive Secretary of SADC. In his current position, he has provided strategic leadership in facilitating negotiation, conclusion and ratification of the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area. In addition, H.E. Amb. Muchanga has provided similar leadership on matters of trade, industrialization, mining and customs cooperation. He works with ease at technical, professional, management, leadership and political levels.

As I earlier mentioned, we shall be able to listen to two other distinguished speakers with immense careers in international trade and multilateral trade issues namely, His Excellency Ambassador Wamkele Mene, the Secretary General of the African Continental Free Trade Area, who will make his Keynote Address this morning. And Ambassador Allan Wolff, the Deputy Director General at the World Trade Organization, who will also address us this morning.

You do recall that Ambassador Mene was elected by the 33<sup>rd</sup> Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of States & Government of the African Union, to the position of Secretary-General of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Secretariat.

Prior to being elected Secretary-General of the African Continental Free Trade Area Secretariat, he served as *Chief Director: Africa Economic Relations*, at the Department of Trade & Industry of South Africa. In this role, he was South Africa's chief trade negotiator in the Africa Continental Free Trade Area and Tripartite FTA negotiations. During his tenure as chief negotiator, South Africa ratified both the Africa Continental Free Trade Area and Tripartite FTAs agreements, providing new export markets in fast growing and dynamic markets in East and West Africa.

Prior to assuming this position, Ambassador Mene was *Director: International Trade Law & Investment Law* at the Department of Trade & Industry, a role in which he was principal legal counsel on international trade law and international investment law.

From 2010 until 2015, Ambassador Mene represented South Africa at the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Geneva, Switzerland. During his posting to the WTO, Ambassador Mene was elected by over 130 governments to the position of Chairman of the Committee on International Trade in Financial Services, a committee comprising trade negotiators, financial regulators and financial policy makers from over 160 countries.

I also wish to welcome Ambassador Alan Wolff, who is the Deputy-Director General of the World Trade Organisation. He became WTO Deputy Director General on October 1, 2017. He was formerly in private law practice in Washington DC dealing extensively with international trade matters. Prior to joining the WTO he was Chairman of the National Foreign Trade Council (NFTC), the oldest American association supporting open international trade.

Ambassador Wolff's prior public service includes being U.S. Deputy Special Representative for Trade Negotiations after being General Counsel of the Office, serving as acting Head of the U.S. Delegation for the Tokyo Round of multilateral trade negotiations, and as a principal draftsman of the basic U.S. law creating a mandate for trade negotiations. He has served as a senior trade negotiator in, and advisor to, both Republican and Democratic administrations.

Finally, allow me to thank and welcome the various moderators and panellists on the various sessions, I am convinced that with their accumulated experiences and knowledge of the matters under discussion, our event shall prove to be more informative and educative.

I wish you good deliberations.

Thank you.