

AFRICAN UNION
الاتحاد الأفريقي



UNION AFRICAINE

UNIÃO AFRICANA

Addis Ababa, ETHIOPIA P. O. Box 3243 Telephone : 517 700 Fax : 517844/512622

**STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY MR. MOUSSA FAKI MAHAMAT,
CHAIRPERSON OF THE AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION
DELIVERED AT THE 12TH EXTRA-ORDINARY SUMMIT
FOR THE LAUNCH OF THE OPERATIONAL PHASE OF THE
AFRICAN CONTINENTAL FREE TRADE AREA (AfCFTA)
7 JULY 2019, NIAMEY, NIGER**

**Your Excellency, Mr. Abdel Fattah Al Sisi, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt, Current Chairman of the African Union,
Excellency Mr. Issoufou Mahamadou, President of the Republic of Niger, Champion of the African Continental Free Trade Area,
Excellencies, Heads of State and Government,
Madam Amina Mohammed, Deputy Secretary General of the United Nations,**

A dream, an old dream which is becoming a reality. Envisaged as the inaugural summit of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in May 1963, the African Continental Free Trade Area which we are launching today is one of the most emblematic projects of the African Agenda. The Founding Fathers must be certainly feeling proud. Kwame Nkrumah, Jamal Abdel Nasser, Haile Selassie, Hamani Diori and others must finally be saying – At long last!

May I, Excellencies, Heads of State and Government, express my grateful thanks to you for your continued support and personal commitment which enabled this invaluable achievement.

A special mention for H.E Issoufou Mahamadou, President of the Republic of Niger and Champion of the AfCFTA, for his leadership and commitment to successfully carry out the exalting mission you have entrusted to him.

Indeed, he has masterfully driven, with faith, passion and determination, the whole process that led to this historic meeting today.

It is also an opportunity to commend the remarkable work accomplished by the Commission, particularly the Department of Trade and Industry under the leadership of Commissioner Albert Muchanga, the African Ministers and Experts for their contribution.

Adopted and opened for signature on 21 March 2018 in Kigali, the AfCFTA Agreement recorded 44 signatures at its birth, a record number in the annals of the legal architecture of our Union. And hardly a year lapsed, the number of signatures increased to 52 and with the signature by Nigeria and Benin we have now reached 54, with 27 ratifications deposited.

With its entry into force on 30 May 2019, the AfCFTA thus becomes the largest commercial space in the world. Africa, with population of 1.27 billion people, should reach 1.7 billion by 2030 and 2.5 billion by 2050, that is 26% of the world's working-age population and nearly 70% of this population is under 30 years and more than half are women.

The growth of the African economy should be twice as fast as that of the developed world. Africa is the second largest Continent and second largest population in the world.

These scales bear evidence to the huge potential of Africa. Let us reap the advantage, the dividends for our peoples whose majority are youths.

**Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Thanks to the remarkable work of our Ministers and Experts, the AfCFTA will be supported, from the outset of its launch, by well-defined Rules of Origin, schedules of tariff concessions in the Trade in goods, an online Continental non-tariff barriers monitoring and elimination mechanism, a Pan-

African digital payments and settlement platform, a web-based and mobile application for business, as well as an African Trade Observatory portal.

The Reports submitted to your Assembly contain several legal instruments, in support of the Agreement, including 3 Protocols, mechanisms and modalities for its implementation which, undoubtedly, will enable us overcome all obstacles to trade.

**Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The vision of the African Continental integration dates back to the inaugural OAU summit of May 1963, which had requested a preparatory Economic Committee to study the possibility of establishing a free trade area between the various African countries, a common external tariff to protect the emerging industries and the establishment of a Raw Materials Price Stabilization Fund. This Niamey Summit is all the more important as it sets the tone and renews the political commitment to work towards the realisation of the vision of the Agenda 2063. The negotiations to make the AfCFTA effective still depend on many risks of all kind.

The relatively fast entry into force is a source of pride for all of us. One of the characteristics of the AfCFTA is the diversity of economic, geographical, demographic situations ranging from the smallest (less than \$ 1 billion) to the biggest (\$ 350 billion).

More than a free trade area, the AfCFTA is a tool by excellence, that will make possible more advanced forms of integration in Africa, in line with the objectives of the Abuja Treaty and the aspirations of Agenda 2063.

It is obvious that the operationalisation of the AfCFTA will encourage entrepreneurship, job creation and the emancipation of women, this African youth, now falling prey to all the temptations (rural exodus, migration, trafficking, cross border crime).

We are in Niger, country of transit. We are at the border of Libya where hundreds of thousands of African migrants live in the horror of death and humiliation. We are challenged. We must act and act now.

The AfCFTA can only be effective if we open our borders to Africans. I want to stress the imperative need to ratify the Protocol on Free Movement which is a condition for free trade.

It is indeed paradoxical and inexplicable that Africans feel, even today, as foreigners at home, subjected to visa requirement less favourable compared to other citizens of the world, as it appears in some of our States. Similarly, Member States must begin to popularise the distribution of the PanAfrican passport, which is a wonderful tool for the promotion of African identity.

The other prerequisite for trade integration is the execution of infrastructures which will enable interconnection between countries and regions (roads, rail roads, bridges, airports, energy, telecommunication).

**Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I cannot conclude my remarks without highlighting the central role of peacebuilding and security on our Continent.

It will be a delusion to talk about trade or development without peace and security. Niger (as we are here), Chad, Cameroon, an agro pastoral country whose market is Nigeria, live it on a daily basis since many years. The cattle dimension, for example, is practically cut off because of Boko Haram. Furthermore, the Sahel countries devote a third of their budget to security to the detriment of the social sectors, real engines of development. The same situation is observed in the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes Region.

Within this framework, our major challenge is to concretely execute the other flagship project of Agenda 2063, that of "*Silencing the Guns by 2020*", chosen as the theme for the year 2020.

I am convinced that Niamey will forever mark the contemporary history of Africa by ushering in a new era.

I thank you for your kind attention.