

Media release

3 November 2015

Geneva, Switzerland

4th Trade Policy Review of the Southern African Customs Union Member States

Senior Trade Officials from the Governments of the five Member States of the Southern African Customs Union (SACU) and the Executive Secretary of SACU, Ms Paulina Elago are gathered this week in Geneva, Switzerland to undergo reviews of their respective trade policies by the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

It is the 4th time that SACU Member States' trade policies are being reviewed by the world body that governs multilateral trade across the globe. All SACU Countries are members of the WTO and as a result have certain legal commitments to fulfil from time to time. One such commitment being periodic reviews of their trade policies by the Trade Policy Review Mechanism overseen by the WTO Committee on Regional Trade Agreements. The 4th Trade Policy Review of SACU will take place from 4-6 November 2015 at the WTO Secretariat in Geneva.

The Trade Policy Review Mechanism is the most important transparency exercise of the WTO. Its purpose is to examine and evaluate Member Countries' trade and related policies at regular intervals and contribute to improved adherence by all Members to rules, disciplines and commitments made under the different WTO provisions and agreements. Significant developments which may have an impact on the global trading system are also monitored. It aims at promoting a smoother functioning of the multilateral trading system, by achieving greater transparency in, and understanding of, the trade policies and practices of WTO members.

While not intended to serve as a basis for the enforcement of specific obligations, it is meant to provide for an overall assessment of the trade policy of the different WTO Members.

For each review, two documents are prepared: a policy statement by the government of the Member Country under review, and a detailed report written independently by the WTO Secretariat. The Secretariat report covers the development of all aspects of SACU Member States trade policies, including domestic laws and regulations, the institutional framework, trade policies by measure and by sector.

These documents are then discussed by the WTO's full membership in the Trade Policy Review Body (TPRB). Written and verbal questions from WTO Members are submitted to which the SACU Member States will have to respond. These documents and the proceedings of the TPRB's meetings are published shortly afterwards. Since 1995, when the WTO came into force, services and trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights have also been covered.

Under the WTO's Trade Policy Review Mechanism, the four largest Members in terms of trade volume are reviewed every two years; currently, these Members are the EU, the US, Japan and China. The next 16 Members are reviewed every four years, and the rest every six years; a longer period may be fixed for Least Developed Country Members. SACU Member States are reviewed every six years by the WTO Trade Policy Review Body – the previous review was held in November 2009.

SACU will be represented at the Review this week in Geneva by Senior Trade Officials and Government Representatives from SACU Member States' Capitols and Geneva-based Trade Missions and Embassies. The Executive Secretary of SACU and officials from the SACU Secretariat will also be in attendance to provide support to SACU Member States.

--oOo--