

REMARKS BY THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY DURING THE WEBINAR ON
THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AfCFTA BY SACU MEMBER STATES

THURSDAY, 8 APRIL 2021

Director of Ceremony,
Secretary General of the AfCFTA Secretariat, H.E. Wamkele Mene,
Guest Speakers,
Senior Government Officials,
Heads of Customs Administrations,
Representatives from the Private Sector,
The media,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Good Morning and I trust that we are all keeping safe and adhering to COVID 19 protocols at all times.

1. Please allow me, on behalf of the SACU Secretariat and on my own behalf to welcome you and express our sincere appreciation to you all for accepting our invitation to participate in the Webinar this morning.
2. Allow me also to thank and extend a warm welcome to H.E. Wamkele Mene, the Secretary General of the AfCFTA Secretariat, who is currently in Namibia on an official visit, for agreeing to grace our Webinar at such

a short notice. It is a great pleasure to have you with us my dear brother, despite your very busy schedule. SACU is your home, and we are proud to have you amongst us.

3. I also wish to welcome and extend my special thanks to Ms. Trudi Hartzenberg, the Executive Director of Tralac, who is no stranger to SACU, for accepting our invitation to share her insights on the topic that she has a wealth of knowledge and is passionate about. Welcome Trudi. Similarly, I wish to express my appreciation to all the speakers for agreeing to participate in this Webinar, we look forward to your contributions, having been closely associated with the AfCFTA either as negotiators, policy advisers, experts or interested stakeholders.
4. The purpose for the Webinar is to disseminate information about the implementation of the AfCFTA by the SACU Member States, namely Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Namibia and South Africa. We will also cover the procedures and processes put in place in each Member States to facilitate trading under the AfCFTA. It is the first time, since the start of trading on 1st January 2021, for stakeholders in the SACU region especially the business community, to come together and deliberate, at the regional level, on issues related to the implementation of the AfCFTA.
5. We recognise that individual Member States have commenced their awareness campaigns at the national level. However, we still find this event unique in the sense it affords all key stakeholders an opportunity to engage at a regional level. For example, the private sector will have an opportunity to interact with policy makers and implementers at the regional level. We believe this event would provide stakeholders a perspective on a regional approach to the implementation of the AfCFTA.

Director or Ceremony,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

6. The AfCFTA is one of Africa's flagships projects for achieving Africa's aspirations regarding "*The Africa we want*", as outlined under the Africa Strategic Framework for Development, Agenda 2063. The main aim of the AfCFTA is to boost intra-African trade, continental integration and development. It seeks to create a single integrated market for goods, services, and promoting cross-border movement of capital and persons, which are crucial for deepening economic integration.
7. The AfCFTA will also provide an opportunity for the Continent to enhance its productive capacity and to build robust regional value chains to effectively supply the African market, comprising 55 countries with estimated 1.3 billion consumers and a combined GDP of around \$3.4 trillion. It further creates an opportunity to modernise and streamline Customs processes, procedures and requirements for import and export in the Continent.
8. For SACU, the importance attached to the AfCFTA cannot be over emphasised. The AfCFTA will enable the SACU region and the Continent at large to deepen integration, a move that is in line with SACU's own objectives. For this reason, SACU has placed the implementation of the AfCFTA among its top priorities.
9. In preparation for start of Trading on 1st January 2021, SACU had tabled an initial tariff offer comprising around 5988 tariff lines, representing 77 percent of the SACU tariff book with agreed Rules of Origin, to be liberalised as part of the 90 percent level of ambition. This SACU's tariff schedule has been published and is already operationalised in all SACU

Member States except Botswana whose ratification process for the AfCFTA is at advanced stage. Currently SACU is working intensely on the remaining work to finalise its tariff offer in accordance with the agreed modalities. This includes designation of sensitive products and exclusion list.

10. The 13th Extra-Ordinary Session of the African Union Assembly of Heads of State and Government held on 5th December 2020 has set June 2021 as deadline to complete all the Built-in Agenda issues for Phase I of the AfCFTA negotiations, including tariff offers and outstanding Rules of Origin. We are therefore working towards meeting that deadline.
11. With such an enormous market presented by the AfCFTA, it is incumbent upon the SACU private sector to seize and capitalise on the opportunities to grow their business through regional value chains and cross border trade. Without the participation of the business sector, all these efforts will be meaningless. In this regard, the SACU Council of Ministers has agreed to prioritise industrialisation through the development of Regional Value Chains, Export and Investment promotion. To that end, the region is currently undertaking technical work to outline a systematic approach and practical steps to scale up the region's industrial base and to strategically positioning itself to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by the AfCFTA.
12. Equally important is the Trade Facilitation component. SACU has through its SACU Customs Modernisation Programme laid the groundwork that will enhance efficiency in our Customs operations. For example, SACU Member States Customs IT Management Systems are now linked to automatically exchange information. This is a great milestone and a steppingstone

towards enhancing efficiencies. We will receive a full presentation later on the SACU Customs Modernisation Programme.

13. In addition, SACU Member States are participating in the in online Non-tariff barriers (NTBs) mechanism for speedy reporting and resolution of NTBs which the AfCFTA has been put in place.
14. I therefore call on the private sector, SMEs, youth, and women to seize the opportunity and leverage on the AfCFTA market opportunities to increase trade, attract investment and create employment in the SACU region.
15. As the SACU Secretariat, we reiterate our continuing commitment to facilitate the engagement of SACU Member States in the AfCFTA negotiations, and its full implementation. We will also continue to share necessary information to ensure that the SACU region derives full benefits from the continental market.
16. With these few remarks, I wish to declare this Webinar officially open.

I thank you!