



ITUC-AFRICA CONTINENTAL FORUM ON THE AFRICAN CONTINENTAL FREE TRADE AREA (AfCFTA) AGREEMENT

Tunis Statement – 27 September 2022

We, African trade unions leaders, researchers and educators, meeting at the ITUC-Africa Continental Forum from 26 to 27 September in Tunis, have deliberated on the AfCFTA and agreed as follows.

Like many groups of African citizens, the trade union movement welcomed the adoption of the AfCFTA agenda in 2012 by African Heads of State with expectation that it will be an instrument for the transformation and integration of Africa's economies, driven by and meeting the needs and aspirations of all their peoples, a long-standing desire which has been captured in many African initiatives adopted since independence, including Agenda 2063. In particular, as workers organisations, our expectations included that such economic transformation will be the basis for sustainable economic development; reverse decades of de-industrialisation and jobless growth to which Africa's economies have been subjected, and create expanded opportunities for decent work and means of livelihood for our people.

Similarly to other civil society organisations in Africa advocating for equitable trade and development policies, we understand that **“such transformation and integration of Africa's economies require packages of policies that complement each other to build the capacity of African producers and productive capabilities in general; develop national and regional infrastructure; and create integrated national and regional markets for African products, producers and investment. Such policies must aim to develop domestic – that is national and regional ~ linkages among various sectors of economic activity, including agriculture, manufacture, and resource extraction sectors. The policies must be based on, nurture, support and promote indigenous, domestic and regional enterprise in all variety, including through the development of productive networks among Africa's enterprises, from small and medium to large ones. Such policies must also promote and protect the economic, social, and cultural rights and material needs of the peoples across Africa.”**¹

Furthermore, as organisations of workers who have, for the past four decades, borne the brunt of the negative effects of neo-liberal structural adjustment policies, we are aware that policies for the transformation of the African economies must be sensitive to and address the specific situations and needs of the diverse class, gender, and other disempowered social groupings, including workers, farmers,

¹ Statement of civil society organisations, including labour unions, adopted at Africa Trade Network event in Addis Ababa in 2016.

small-scale producers, and traders. Above, all the rights of people to full productive and decent work and means of livelihood have to be central to these policies.

We recognise that trade policies, including elements of trade liberalisation and deregulation, are relevant. However, from the experience of working people and our experience as their organisations, the benefits of trade policies for Africa (and generally) arise from the balanced contribution that they make to the development of national productive capabilities, through sustainable industrialisation, and the creation thereby of decent jobs and means of decent livelihood. The liberalization of trade, such as envisaged under the Protocols of goods and services as concluded, are thus only one instrument of the package of instruments that need to be balanced in the process of industrialisation. It made sense therefore the AfCFTA agenda adopted in 2012 was part of the broader policies for Boosting Intra African Trade (BIAT).

Unfortunately, the above critical considerations are far from the reality of the actual AfCFTA treaty that came into being in Kigali, Rwanda in 2018, and which, consequent upon the requisite number of ratifications, is in various stages of operationalisation and further negotiations.

The process of the negotiations up to the Kigali Treaty and thereafter have provided little space for the structured and effective participation of citizens in their various socio-economic groupings, including workers, farmers, women, youth and domestic private sectors. At best, therefore, the views and experiences of these groups have been marginal in the agreements that have emerged.

As adopted, the AfCFTA agreement is essentially the fast-tracking of the trade liberalization and deregulation component at the expense of a coherent interface or sequenced inter-connection with the other policy elements of the BIAT package or which African leaders themselves have put forward as necessary for a balanced process of Africa's economic transformation. The Protocols on Goods and on Services do not contain the appropriate flexibility or space to enable the kind of actions needed in these other areas of policy or indeed in the many other continent-wide policy initiatives in the areas such as industry, agriculture, minerals that are designed to contribute to Africa's transformation.

Moreover, the terms of the concluded protocols are likely to constrain related policies to address the challenges of smaller economies as well as domestic producers, especially the more marginal and fragile ones to benefit from the continent-wide trade liberalisation. The specific interests of workers, women, the youth and other vulnerable groups have not been reflected in the basic design of these protocols, and it is not clear how the belated on-going attempts to fashion protocols on youth and gender can effectively redress the inherent design flaws.

Ultimately, both the broad orientation and specifics of these protocols seem designed more with an eye on creating a large continental market than on nurturing the domestic investment and productive capacity for that market. The same orientation is so far evident with regard to the protocols that are still being negotiated on investment, competition, intellectual property and electronic commerce.

In effect the AfCFTA agreement officially launched in January 2021 and its processes are not sufficient to meet the transformation imperatives of the economies of the continent. On the contrary, by giving

advantage to the larger economic players on the continent, which also happen to be related to economic forces outside the continent, the agreement risks reinforcing the continent's problems and its inequities. In the process our expectation of industrialisation and the basis for the sustainable creation of decent jobs and livelihoods risk not being realised. This must be re-dressed.

We therefore call, in both the operationalisation of the already concluded protocols as well as in the design and negotiation of the protocols yet to be concluded, for the adoption of:

- a) **a trade policy approach and orientation which is more clearly calibrated to the challenges of transformation as identified in Agenda 2063 and other African initiatives; paying**
- b) **particular and explicit attention to the imperatives of expanded economic development, industrialisation and the provision of meaningful jobs including recognized labour standards; and**
- c) **processes which integrate the effective role and participation of the African citizens in the spirit of the Constitutive Act of the African Union.**

To this end, we demand that:

- a) **space of social dialogue must be created at the national, regional and continental level for African citizens, and their socio-economic groupings – that is workers including those of the informal economy, farmers, traders, producers, enterprises, civil society, private sector – to participate effectively in a democratic and transparent process and ensure the reflection of their concerns and views in the negotiations;**
- b) **information on the AfCFTA processes be made available in timely and accessible manner to citizens to enable their input and effective participation at national, regional and continental levels.**

As representatives of the workers movement in Africa, we commit to mobilising the experience, capacities and knowledge of our constituents in order to contribute our perspectives on trade and the equitable transformation of Africa's economies through the AfCFTA.

Finally, we affirm our commitment as organised labour to work with our other allies in the non-state actor community to develop and work with a shared narrative on the AfCFTA. Critical is that we shall create a common strategy to ensure that our voices, aspirations and demands find effective insertion, application and enforcement to benefit our members, peoples and communities.