

**Opening Remarks of  
H.E. Ambassador Lachezara Stoeva, Permanent Representative of  
Bulgaria to the United Nations and President of the ECOSOC**

**High-level Policy Dialogue of the Africa Dialogue Series 2023**

**Tuesday, 23 May 2023**

**10:00 am to 1:00 pm**

**Trusteeship Council Chamber**

Excellencies,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to deliver opening remarks at today's High-level Policy Dialogue segment dedicated to the theme **“Growing Middle Class and Import Substitution: Connecting the Dots to Unlock Made in Africa”**.

Let me take this opportunity to commend the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa and the African Union Permanent Observer Mission to the UN for organizing this year's Africa Dialogue Series (ADS) on the theme of African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). The choice of this theme, which also coincides with the African Union's theme of the year, could not have been timelier.

The ADS 2023 has generated a lively debate on various aspects of the African Continental Free Trade Area, all throughout the month of May. This debate has given rise to a variety of platforms, such as interviews, policy briefs, webinars, and interactions with the continent's youth.

This is a crucial year in the global community's joint efforts to 'leave no one behind.'

From the perspective of the United Nations, we are already well into the Decade of Action to deliver the SDGs. We are gearing up for the SDG Summit in September

2023. The HLPF in July, under the auspices of the ECOSOC, is seen, fittingly, as a pre-Summit event.

From a regional perspective, the First Ten-year Implementation Plan of the African Union's Agenda 2063 concludes this year. The lessons learnt from the first decade of implementation will inform the plans for the next decades and help redouble efforts to achieve Africa's own transformative vision.

Against this backdrop, the African Continental Free Trade Area represents a major game changer. The creation of a single continental market, covering a population of 1.3 billion, mostly young, people and a combined GDP of \$3.4 trillion is a major enabler for the continent's inclusive and sustainable industrialisation. Improved economies of scale and a growing middle class in Africa will shape the consumption and production trends in the Continent.

Recent studies estimate that, if fully implemented, the African Continent free trade area could bring income gains to the Continent of between 7% (\$ 450 billion) and 9% (\$ 571 billion) by 2035. This could lift up to 50 million people out of extreme poverty. These factors combined could expand Africa's already growing middle class, which drives the increasing demand for goods and services that are "Made in Africa".

The size of Africa's middle class is estimated to reach 1.1 billion (or 42% of Africa's population) by 2060. This fact alone means that the production and consumption patterns of African economies are bound to change dramatically in the coming years, to meet the demand from its growing middle class.

Your policymakers have an enormous opportunity to turn this regional integration process into a virtuous cycle.

AfCFTA implementation will further expand the market size in Africa, making domestic manufacturing more viable in the continent. The creation of new decent jobs should, in turn, lead to increasing purchasing power and positive gains in poverty reduction.

With the increasingly negative impact of the current crises, there is now a shared realisation of the potential for Africa to meet its own demands in a variety of key sectors, including pharmaceuticals, automotive products, baby food and textiles, to name a few.

Infrastructure is key to unlocking this potential. Africa's infrastructure deficit is a critical bottleneck constraining the continent's inclusive growth and sustainable development. AfDB estimates this deficit to be more than \$100 billion annually. Leveraging Africa's "Just Transition" in these areas must be complemented by the financial inclusion of women, youth and SMEs.

Against that backdrop, this moment provides African policymakers with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to leapfrog Africa's industrialisation to firmly put the continent on the path to achieve the "Africa We Want".

In closing, it is worth re-stating that Africa is at the heart of the United Nations and ECOSOC's agenda. We continue to approach Africa's development comprehensively, taking into account the interactions between peace and security, human rights, climate and development.

We will continue to be Africa's reliable partners on the continent's journey to unlocking its inclusive socio-economic potential and to realize the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063 in tandem, to make sure we leave no one behind.

I wish you success in your deliberations, and look forward to the outcome of this Africa Dialogue Series

Thank you.