### DRAFT STATEMENT BY H.E. WAMKELE MENE, SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE AfCFTA SECRETARIAT, AT THE OPENENING CEREMONY OF THE MINISTERIAL RETREAT

29 MAY 2023

NAIROBI, KENYA

Your Excellency Dr. William Ruto, President of the Republic of Kenya, host of the Ministerial Retreat;

Your Excellency Mr. Azali Assoumani, President of the Union of Comoros and Chairperson of the African Union;

Your Excellency Mr. Mahamadou Issoufou, Former President of the Republic of Niger and Leader and Champion of the AfCFTA;

Honourable Ministers of Trade present here today;

Senior Trade and Customs Officials;

Representatives of the Private Sector;

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen;

Allow me to start my remarks by expressing my gratitude to His Excellency President Ruto and the Government of the Republic of Kenya for hosting us in this beautiful city of Nairobi. His presence with us here today demonstrates his strong leadership and commitment to advance the progress in the implementation process of the African Continental Free Trade Area.

I would like to further express my gratitude to His Excellency President Assoumani for his support and guidance in the implementation of the AU Theme of the Year 2023: “Acceleration of the AfCFTA Implementation”; and His Excellency President Issoufou for his unwavering commitment and continuous support of the AfCFTA process.

Today, 29 May 2023, we are celebrating the 4th Anniversary of the AfCFTA as it makes 4 years since the Entry into Force of the AfCFTA Agreement. We can count many achievements thus far, not only in terms of ratifications, but also in terms of developing and operationalising legal instruments and mechanisms towards commercially meaningful trade under the AfCFTA preferential regime. However, we still have much to do in view of the full implementation of the AfCFTA.

**Excellencies;**

**Distinguished participants,**

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

That is the reason why I also express my deep gratitude to you Honourable Ministers, for making time, despite your tight agendas, to come and participate in-person in this Ministerial Retreat, in order to address together some of the outstanding issues related to the effective implementation of the AfCFTA and development a roadmap with concrete actions for acceleration of the AfCFTA implementation.

Some of these issues include the Outstanding Rules of Origin on Automotive and Textiles Sectors, allocations of the adjustment facility according to countries’ estimated tariff revenue losses; strategies for the frontloading liberalisation of trade in basic agricultural products in order to cope with food insecurity on our continent; updates on the Guided Trade Initiative and on Customs, trade facilitation and transit in the AfCFTA.

On another note, Honourable Ministers, the AU Assembly endorsed, in February 2023, the recruitment of the Deputy Secretary-General (DSG) for the AfCFTA Secretariat. The call for application had been advertised on the AU website and the preselection process has enabled to shortlist candidates for interviews. I would like then to request for the availability of the Members of the Bureau of the Council of Ministers for the interview of the DSG. The DSG shall be recruited for a four-year term, renewable once; and I wish to recall that for gender and language balance, it has been advised that the DSG shall be a female and her first language shall be another AU working language that is not English.

As I conclude, I would like inform Honourable Ministers that, as per the Draft Agenda that has been distributed, there will be an Extraordinary Session of the Council of Ministers on the 31st of May, in order to consider the outcomes of the Ministerial Retreat. Additionally, Honourable Ministers will advise on when the next meeting of Council can take place in an Ordinary Session.

I thank you for your kind attention.