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AfCFTA Digital Trade and Services Forum Concludes with Shared Commitments to Advancing Africa's Digital Economy

Lusaka, Zambia – 10 May 2025- The inaugural AfCFTA Digital Trade and Services Forum concluded today in Lusaka, marking a significant milestone in Africa's journey toward building a unified digital economy. Convened under the theme *"Boosting Digital Trade to Accelerate AfCFTA Implementation,"* the three-day Forum brought together Heads of State and Government, Ministers, the private sector, development partners, and innovators from across the continent and beyond.

Hosted by the Republic of Zambia under the leadership of His Excellency Hakainde Hichilema, President of the Republic of Zambia, and organised with the AfCFTA Secretariat, the Forum served as a platform for dialogue, partnership building and the exchange of ideas to fast-track the implementation of the AfCFTA Protocol on Digital Trade. The Protocol, adopted in record time, has been widely heralded as one of the most forward-looking legal instruments on the continent. It lays the foundation for a single African digital market.

The Forum was also honoured by the presence of His Excellency Duma Boko, President of the Republic of Botswana, whose participation reinforced the collective political will across the continent to deepen digital trade integration under the AfCFTA. Both Heads of State featured in the Presidential Plenary, alongside the Secretary-General of the AfCFTA Secretariat, H.E. Wamkele Mene, to discuss unlocking the potential of digital trade as a vehicle for growth, innovation and inclusion.

Over the course of the Forum, participants engaged in ten plenaries and parallel sessions covering a broad spectrum of topics, including digital inclusion for MSMEs, cross-border payments, data governance, artificial intelligence, and the monetisation of digital platforms. The discussions consistently underscored the urgent need to invest in interoperable infrastructure, harmonised regulations, and capacity-building initiatives that equip African youth, women and small enterprises to compete in the digital age.

In a key highlight, the AfCFTA Secretariat, in partnership with the Google Hustle Academy, launched the AfCFTA Digital Skills and Entrepreneurship Programme. This initiative is aimed at bridging Africa's digital skills gap and empowering a new generation of entrepreneurs. The Forum also honoured the top ten finalists of the AfCFTA Digital Innovation Challenge, affirming the role of African solutions in driving the continent's economic transformation.

In his keynote address, President Hichilema reaffirmed Zambia's commitment to positioning itself as a leading force in Africa's digital transformation, calling for stronger collaboration



between governments and the private sector to ensure inclusive growth through digital trade. His call was echoed by H.E. Mene, who stressed the urgency of collective action in building digital infrastructure, securing investment, and scaling up innovation.

The closing ceremony featured the presentation of a Call to Action titled “The Road to Success: Charting the Course for Digital Trade under the AfCFTA.” It outlines key priorities including the need to strengthen digital infrastructure, support African-owned platforms, promote digital skills development, and adopt harmonised regulations that prioritise inclusivity and security. It calls on all stakeholders to ensure that digital trade becomes a driver of equitable economic growth across the continent.

As Africa moves from negotiation to implementation, the momentum generated in Lusaka is a clear signal that digital trade is not a future ambition. It is a present imperative. The Forum reaffirmed that by working together, Africa can build a thriving digital economy that leaves no one behind and secures its place as a global leader in innovation, resilience and integration.

About AfCFTA

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is one of the flagship projects of Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want and entered into force on 30 May 2019, with trading under the Agreement commencing on 1 January 2021. It is a high-ambition trade agreement aimed at bringing together all 55 African Union (AU) Member States, covering a market of more than 1.3 billion people. With a comprehensive scope, the AfCFTA addresses key areas of Africa’s economy, including trade in goods and services, digital trade, investment protection, intellectual property rights, and competition policy among other areas. By eliminating barriers to trade within the continent, the AfCFTA seeks to significantly boost intra-African trade, particularly in value-added production and services sectors. According to estimates, the Agreement has the potential to increase intra-African trade by 52.3% through tariff liberalization and trade facilitation measures. For more information, please visit: <https://au-afcfta.org>

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