



**ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA**

**Office for North Africa**

## **North Africa Development Forum**

### **“Trade for Growth and Job Creation”**

**Marrakech, Kingdom of Morocco**

**19-20 February 2007**

Original: French

#### **I. Why a forum on regional trade**

The role of trade as a driving force of economic development and growth has become unquestionable. There is widespread evidence that openness and trade liberalization are key components of the national policy mix required for economic growth and well-being. The process has been central to the growth of industrial countries and to the successful economic development of various countries since the 1970's. With the appropriate policies, trade can reduce poverty and help countries accelerate progress towards the attainment of sustainable development and the millennium development goals (MDGs).

In countries of North Africa, it is legitimate to ask whether an increase in the pace of trade liberalization is necessary for improved economic growth and welfare. Tariffs applied to imported products are amongst the highest worldwide. For instance, the average of most favored nations (MFN) customs duties applied in the industry sector is 21% for the whole region against 10.8% for Asia and 9.5% for Latin-American countries. Although these protection rates have considerably declined over the last ten years, the trend has not been uniform among all countries. Moreover, despite various regional integration initiatives, intra-regional trade flow remains tremendously low. Trade performance is also hindered by highly concentrated geographical distribution, coupled with a poorly diversified export structure.

While the increase of growth rates in North African countries didn't have a significant impact on unemployment reduction in particular and poverty alleviation in general, recent studies undertaken by the ECA Office for North Africa show that with basic and adequate measures, intra-regional trade could be multiplied by 5 to 10. Facilitating private sector initiatives for exploiting this formidable potential can be a way for higher as well as job creating growth rates and improved standards of living. It is important to explore how policy makers and private sector operators can put in place trade strategies that are supportive of sustainable human and economic development. In addition, joining hands and promoting economic integration is necessary for strengthening the region's position in international trade-related negotiations.

It is against this background that the ECA Office for North Africa organizes a Forum on “Trade for Growth and Job Creation”, in collaboration with the Government of the Kingdom of Morocco and a number of development partners.

## **II. What the forum aims to achieve**

The forum contributes to ongoing national and international initiatives aiming at intensifying inter as well as intra-regional trade flows and insuring that trade policies are adequate with sustainable development. It is a meeting for policy makers and private sector operators from the region as well as their counterparts and partners from around the world with the following objectives:

- 1) explore the solutions to the issues that are preventing trade promotion in the region,
- 2) give policy makers an opportunity for sharing views and discussing inter- as well as intra-regional trade development policies in line with the socioeconomic development objectives of each country,
- 3) recommend the implementation of a permanent mechanism that will allow policy makers to discuss and find resources for formulating trade promotion strategies, and
- 4) provide private sector operators with a platform for finding market information, identifying trade opportunities and understanding trade mechanisms.

The forum highlights the various dimensions of the relationship between openness, economic growth and welfare. Evidence from North Africa and elsewhere shows that the increase and the stabilization in economic growth rates are due to strengthening inter-linkages between the industrial, the agricultural and the services sectors. The forum provides an opportunity for discussing how this process can be pursued with innovating policies that give the information and knowledge economy a central role in facilitating and stimulating trade activities and ensuring that trade growth is compatible with of sustainable development. It addresses the question of how the process must be managed in terms of governance and public-private partnerships in order to lead to sound trade promotion and regional integration strategies. A central debate in this process is that the nature of information technologies requires policy makers to reformulate the legal understanding and the status of intellectual property rights.

## **III. How the forum is organized**

The forum is articulated around plenary sessions, workshops and a market place.

Preliminary plenary sessions are intended to set the stage with keynotes:

- highlighting the central role of trade in sustainable economic and human development and the opportunities offered by the multilateral trading system,
- presenting the current status of multilateral trade negotiations and evidence from regional integration experiences and how North Africa can build-up on these experiences for defining a successful integration,
- providing facts and figures on the nature of trade in North Africa, learning from the experiences of private sector operators currently contributing to trade within the region, and defining the challenges for designing appropriate trade policies, and
- exploring the way forward and the lessons learned from the strengthening environment the information and knowledge economy provides for trade promotion.

The workshops explore more specific issues dealing with the policy measures as well as the public-private partnerships required for promoting trade and facilitating economic integration.

Concluding plenary and ministerial dialog sessions are intended to:

- help initiate and/or strengthen multilateral as well as bilateral cooperation mechanisms between the region and partners from international organizations as well as countries or groups of countries from the rest of the African continent as well as from North America and Europe, and
- identify the implications of the forum for capacity building needs and the way forward for providing the region's policy makers and private sector operators with mechanisms for ongoing access to trade promotion resources. A particular emphasis will be placed on the capacity building tools needed to strengthen the ability of North African countries to formulate effective trade policies and integrate them into economic growth and sustainable economic and human development strategies.

Parallel to the plenary sessions and to the workshops the forum provides a market place for facilitating private sector partnerships and business relationships through a speed-business-meeting format

#### **IV. Who participates**

The ECA Office for North Africa covers Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Sudan and Tunisia. Participants are senior civil servants from ministries of trade, representatives of the private sector and export promotion institutions, researchers and non governmental organizations. The World Trade Organization (WTO), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), UN Regional Economic Commissions, and Regional Economic Communities are expected to participate in various capacities.

#### **V. Partners**

The Forum is organized by the ECA Office for North Africa, in collaboration with the Government of the Kingdom of Morocco and a number of development partners.

#### **VI. When and where**

The Forum is scheduled to take place in Marrakech, Kingdom of Morocco, on the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> of February 2007.

#### **VII. Whom to contact**

Requests for information or questions regarding this meeting can be addressed to:

Ms. Karima Bounemra Ben Soltane  
Director, ECA Office for North Africa  
[kbounemra@uneca.org](mailto:kbounemra@uneca.org)

Mr. Karim Laraki  
Forum Coordinator, ECA Office for North Africa  
[klaraki@uneca.org](mailto:klaraki@uneca.org)