COMMUNIQUÉ OF THE TRADE MINISTERIAL MEETING OF THE HORN OF AFRICA INITIATIVE (HoAI)

Addis Ababa, Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

3 September 2026

PREAMBLE

1. **WE**, the Ministers responsible for Trade of the Republic of Djibouti, the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, the Republic of Kenya, the Federal Republic of Somalia, the Republic of South Sudan and the Republic of Sudan, convened in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on 3 September 2026, for the thematic Ministerial Meeting on Trade under the Horn of Africa Initiative (HoAI);

2. **THE MEETING WAS CO-CHAIRED** by Hon. Amb. Gamal Mohamed Hassan, Minister of Commerce and Industry of the Federal Republic of Somalia, and Ms. Elke Loebel, Head of Directorate for the Horn of Africa, Sahel, and Eastern Europe at the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), Federal Republic of Germany;

3. **WELCOMING** the presence and active engagement of Development Partners, including the African Development Bank (AfDB), the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa (BADEA), the European Union (EU), the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ, Germany), the United Kingdom (UK), and the World Bank Group;

4. **EXPRESSING DEEP APPRECIATION** for the steadfast collaboration and institutional engagement of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in the Initiative;

5. **RECOGNIZING** the participation of H.E. Wamkele Mene, Secretary-General of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Secretariat, underscoring the critical linkages between the regional trade agenda and continental integration, and **CONGRATULATING** the Federal Republic of Somalia on the formal assent to the AfCFTA Agreement; further **ACKNOWLEDGING** the participation of Sweden in support of advancing the HoAI trade agenda.

6. **RECALLING** the six years of extensive analytical assessments, technical engagements, and national policy dialogues that established the operational foundation for collective political direction;

7. **REAFFIRMING** the decision adopted by the HoAI Ministers of Finance in January 2026 endorsing the "whole-of-government approach," thereby ensuring multi-sectoral ownership and alignment across technical line ministries;

8. **CONSCIOUS** of the prevailing global economic volatility and uncertainties, and **CONVINCED** that accelerated regional trade integration remains essential for building economic resilience, mitigating external shocks, diversifying export markets, and unlocking the potential of the regional marketplace;

KEY DECISIONS AND OUTCOMES

Following comprehensive deliberations, the Ministers:

- **Endorsement of the Regional Trade Facilitation Roadmap (2026–2031): ADOPTED** the revised Regional Trade Facilitation Roadmap (2026–2031), committing member states to the immediate execution of its five foundational priority actions.

- **Establishment of Institutional Architecture: FORMALLY ESTABLISHED** the Regional Trade Facilitation Committee (RTFC) through the signing of the Joint Ministerial Declaration to steer and monitor implementation.

- **Adoption of the 45-Day Operationalization Plan: COMMITTED** to the structured 45-Day Action Plan to operationalize the RTFC, secure dedicated resource allocations, and translate political mandates into measurable border interventions.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND OPERATIONAL DIRECTIVES

The Ministers resolved that implementation shall be guided by the following operational commitments:

- **Translating Commitments to Action:** Ensure high-level political commitments immediately cascade into harmonized administrative practices, aligning national trade legislation, regulations, and border procedures with regional standards.

- **Inclusive Economic Development:** Focus trade facilitation interventions on tangible benefits for the private sector, specifically expanding cross-border opportunities for women, youth, and micro-, small-, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs).

- **Immediate Institutional Designations:** Complete the official nomination of two RTFC representatives per member state by 30 September 2026, **COMMENDING** the Federal Republic of Somalia for having already designated its representatives.

- **Secretariat Mandate:** Direct the HoAI Secretariat, within the 45-day window, to conclude all institutional arrangements and convene the inaugural RTFC session to formalize lead agency assignments, delivery milestones, resource requirements, and a streamlined monitoring and reporting mechanism.

- **Whole-of-Government Coordination at the Border:** Instruct national border agencies—including trade, customs, transport, immigration, standards, and security—to operate cohesively, dismantle non-tariff barriers, accelerate clearance times, and maintain structured consultative channels with the private sector.

PARTNERSHIP COMMITMENTS AND MONITORING

The Ministers:

- **WELCOMED** the reaffirmed commitments from Development Partners in expanding cross-border infrastructure, strengthening regulatory capacity, and advancing trade modernization;

- **NOTED WITH APPRECIATION** the announcement by Germany (BMZ) to finance the first five priority goals under the Roadmap, he declaration by BADEA of its readiness to provide capacity development grants to support the operationalization of the RTFC, alongside the confirmation by the World Bank regarding the forthcoming approval and rollout of the BOOST project, commencing in Ethiopia;

- **AFFIRMED** that the ultimate benchmark of success remains verifiable impacts at the border: reduced dwell times, lower transit and clearance costs, streamlined border documentation, and enhanced predictability for commercial operators;

- **TASKED** the HoAI technical working teams and Secretariat to submit a comprehensive implementation progress report on the short-term action plan by 31 October 2026, ahead of the next Ministerial Meeting.

VOTE OF THANKS

The Ministers expressed their sincere gratitude to the Government and people of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia for their warm hospitality and thanked the Chairpersons for their effective leadership throughout the meeting. Ministers further commended the HoAI Secretariat for its facilitating role and the technical and organizational support it provided in ensuring the successful conclusion of the meeting. They also acknowledged the continued support of the African Development Bank (AfDB), particularly through the funding of national advisors who played a crucial role in guiding the process.

Done at Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on this 3rd Day of September 2026.