MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, ABUJA

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MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS TAKES ECOWAS TRADE LIBERALISATION SCHEME TO NORTH CENTRAL, SEEKS TO BOOST REGIONAL TRADE AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

The Federal Government of Nigeria has reaffirmed its commitment to strengthening regional economic integration and expanding intra-regional trade through the effective implementation of the Economic Community of West African States' Trade Liberalisation Scheme (ETLS).

This position was highlighted at the sensitisation workshop on the ETLS for the North-Central Geopolitical Zone, held on Monday, 2 November 2026, in Lokoja, Kogi State, under the theme, "Harnessing the ECOWAS Trade Liberalisation Scheme to Promote Nigeria's Interregional Trade and Economic Growth."

In his keynote address, His Excellency Alhaji Ahmed Usman Ododo, Executive Governor of Kogi State, represented by Deputy Governor Salifu Joel Oyibo, described the ETLS as an opportunity to expand Kogi State's economic reach, attract investment and connect local production to markets across West Africa.

He underscored the state's strategic location, abundant agricultural and mineral resources, extensive road network, and ongoing development and infrastructure projects, including the proposed Ajaokuta Free Trade Zone, agro-processing zone and Kogi International Airport, as key drivers of industrial growth and expanded trade opportunities.

The Governor advocated for enhanced transportation infrastructure, stronger inter-state collaboration and the elimination of barriers to legitimate cross-border trade, particularly multiple checkpoints, inadequate transport facilities, cumbersome documentation processes and limited access to trade-related information.

While reaffirming his administration's commitment to providing an enabling environment for investment and enterprise development, the Governor urged businesses across the North Central geopolitical zone to improve product quality, packaging and certification in order for them to compete effectively in the ECOWAS market.

Earlier in his opening remarks, the Honourable Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Sola Enikanolaiye, described the ETLS as a cornerstone of Nigeria's regional integration agenda, established to promote intra-community trade with duty and quota free access to approved products originating from Member States. He further explained that the scheme was designed to enhance regional economic cooperation, encourage industrial growth and support Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).

The Minister disclosed that approximately 3,500 Nigerian companies and 20,000 products had been registered under the scheme, significantly below the country's productive capacity and trade potentials. He, therefore, emphasised the need to deepen awareness of the ETLS, strengthen institutional coordination and take deliberate steps to address challenges hindering the full realisation of the Scheme's benefits.

Ambassador Enikanolaiye highlighted Nigeria's significant economic capacity and trade influence in West Africa, anchored on its market size, large population, enormous natural resources, productive capacity, entrepreneurial base and strategic positioning in the ECOWAS. He further noted that these advantages positioned Nigeria to play a strategic role in advancing the objectives of the ETLS and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), both of which serve as key instruments for promoting trade liberalisation, regional economic integration and sustainable development.

Against this backdrop, the Minister called for increased participation in the ETLS by manufacturers, agricultural producers and MSMEs, noting that the Scheme aligned with Nigeria's broader ambition of achieving a one-trillion-dollar economy by 2030 – a vision championed by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, GCFR. He also established the nexus between the scheme and Nigeria's reformulated 4Ds foreign policy priorities - Demography, Development, Diaspora and Democracy - and the principle of strategic autonomy, which place national interests and the welfare of Nigerians at the centre of diplomatic engagements.

In this connection, Ambassador Enikanolaiye encouraged Kogi State and the wider North-Central region to leverage their vast mineral, agricultural and livestock resources for value-addition and integrated industrial outputs, in order to support the positioning of Nigeria for greater trade benefits in West Africa, through the ETLS. He further urged participants to seize the opportunity of the workshop to understand the registration, certification and rules-of-origin requirements necessary to access the regional market and take full advantage of the scheme.

Other stakeholders, including the Secretary to the Kogi State Government, Pastor Mrs Fola Shadia Rekiya Iwade, PhD, reaffirmed Kogi State's readiness to support trade and investment through institutional assistance for business facilitation for MSMEs. They also highlighted the need to improve transport and logistics infrastructure, particularly rail networks,

inland waterways and cargo-handling facilities, to enhance the efficient movement of goods to both domestic and international markets. The organised private sector advocated the removal of non-tariff barriers, and pledged to mobilise businesses, promote awareness on the ETLS, and support compliance with export requirements.

Delivering his closing remarks, the Honourable Minister of State noted that the North-Central region possessed enormous untapped potential in agriculture, livestock, minerals and manufacturing capable of competing not merely within Nigeria, but across the West African sub-region. He added that businesses, particularly MSMEs, were eager to seize regional opportunities but required clearer information, stronger institutional support and simpler pathways to participate in the ETLS legitimately and competitively.

Ambassador Enikanolaiye further emphasised that regional integration was not an abstract diplomatic undertaking but a practical avenue for employment creation, income generation and the improvement of livelihoods. In this regard, he expressed satisfaction that the workshop had achieved its objective of ensuring that businesses, producers and entrepreneurs in Kogi State and the wider North-Central region fully understood the opportunities, requirements and responsibilities associated with the ETLS.

The Minister emphasised the need for effective implementation, urging businesses to take the necessary practical steps to register, meet applicable standards and documentation requirements, and position their products to maximise the benefits of the Scheme. He urged relevant Ministries, Departments and Agencies to provide exporters with the necessary institutional support promptly, transparently and without unnecessary bureaucratic delays.

On behalf of the Federal Government and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Enikanolaiye expressed appreciation to Governor Ahmed Usman Ododo of Kogi State, the ECOWAS Commission, Resource Persons and Experts, regulatory agencies, Chambers of Commerce and Industry, and the business community for their immense support in making the workshop a huge success. He reaffirmed the commitment of the Ministry to sustaining collaboration with them in translating the opportunities offered by the ETLS into tangible and meaningful economic outcomes.

Signed:
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