

**Address by Dr. The Hon. (Mrs.) Marie Christiane Dorine  
Chukowry,  
Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection**

Opening Ceremony of the African Competition Forum (ACF)  
Workshop

Labourdonnais Waterfront Hotel  
05 March 2024

- **Mrs Manorama Mathur-Dabidin**, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Protection,
- **Mr Mahmud Aleem Bocus**, Chairperson of the Competition Commission of Mauritius,
- **Mr Mohamed Ali**, Director of Trade and Competition at the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Secretariat,
- **Respected Commissioners of the Competition Commission of Mauritius**,
- **Mr Deshmuk Kowlessur**, Executive Director of the Competition Commission of Mauritius,
- **Respected Directors, representatives and officials from Regional and National Competition Authorities**,

- **Distinguished delegates and speakers,**
- **Members of the press**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen**
- **All protocols observed,**

I wish you all a pleasant morning and take this opportunity to wish our foreign delegates a warm welcome to Mauritius.

It gives me great pleasure to address such an august forum, and coincidentally just a few months after I addressed and officially opened the ACER Conference in October last.

It is with great pride that we gather here today, with Mauritius, through its esteemed Competition Commission, playing a leading role in bringing together nations from across our African continent. Our collective aim is a noble one - to promote and uphold fair and effective competition practices that will benefit all our people. This united effort demonstrates our region's commitment to creating an environment conducive to economic growth and prosperity for all Africans.

The fact that the Competition Commission of Mauritius has been elected to lead the ACF and AHCAD regional networks is

also a clear demonstration of the confidence which the region has in our country. And we are grateful for that.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

At the core of competition policy and law lies a fundamental principle - empowering the forces of supply and demand to play their crucial role in signaling and determining prices in the marketplace. By allowing these natural market forces to function effectively, we ultimately achieve a more efficient allocation of resources across our economies. This, in turn, promotes the welfare of our citizens as consumers, ensuring they have access to a wide array of high-quality goods and services at affordable prices. Our aim is to create an environment where competition can thrive, driving innovation, productivity and broad-based prosperity.

Therefore, as we all know, the aim of competition policy and law is to guarantee that our citizens deepen the gains from the benefits of liberalization while also insulating these benefits from the effects of market failures caused by private restrictions.

Like many fellow African nations, the Government of Mauritius embarked on an ambitious path of far-reaching economic reforms from the early 1990s onward. These sweeping changes spanned trade policies, fiscal management, and monetary affairs. Within this nexus was a strategic reorientation

towards an open, market-driven economic model that could harness the full power of domestic and international competition.

The gains from these reforms have been profoundly evident. In 2020, the World Bank elevated Mauritius to the prestigious rank of a high-income country, having surpassed the Gross National Income per capita threshold of US\$12,535. This milestone represents our nation's successful transformation from an agrarian economy to one boasting a diversified economic base driving broad-based development.

My fellow citizens, this steady progress is a resounding affirmation that our nation is strategically translating its development vision into tangible realities on the ground. As we gather here today, let us collectively renew our commitment to furthering competition and market reforms - the bedrocks which will serve as the overarching compass guiding Mauritius' future prosperity.

### **Distinguished participants,**

The Government of Mauritius also views competition regulation as an important facet of our economy in terms of decentralizing economic power of firms and improving the standard of living of our citizens. This is because it ensures control of firms' practices, both concerted and unilateral, and

also anticompetitive concentrations which ultimately may injure the welfare of the consumers. If these practices are left unattended, our people in the lower income brackets will be more vulnerable.

Let me take this opportunity to underscore that Mauritius has been at the forefront of promoting competition reforms in our region. Our Competition Act was enacted in 2007, paving the way for the establishment of a fully-fledged Competition Commission just two years later in 2009.

Today, the Government lauds the commendable work undertaken by the Competition Commission of Mauritius over the past decade. We extend our unwavering support to the Commission as it discharges its statutory mandate with complete independence and autonomy.

At the same time, we recognize that the elimination of tariff and non-tariff barriers, coupled with preferential market access through strategic trade partnerships, are crucial for attracting foreign direct investment into our economies and onto the African continent. This investment is vital for driving sustainable economic advancement and uplifting the lives of our people.

Mauritius remains firmly committed to an open, liberal economic and trade policy agenda. Our aim is to enhance our global competitiveness and integration into the multilateral

world trading system. This strategic outlook underpins the series of reforms our Government has implemented, including tariff reductions, dismantling of subsidy programs, fast-tracking approvals for major investment projects, and strengthening the legal framework protecting investor rights.

It is through such holistic policy action that we can unlock the full potential of market competition as an engine of growth, job creation and shared prosperity across our nation.

It is therefore imperative that African jurisdictions be able to inspire confidence in businesses – local and foreign – by reassuring them that their investments will not be eroded through national protectionist policies or anticompetitive tricks from business operators. This is where the AfCFTA, through its Competition Protocol, finds its *raison d'être*.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

We are all acutely aware of the immense opportunities presented by the historic African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement - the flagship project of the African Union's Agenda 2063 development blueprint. This groundbreaking pact unites all 55 African nations into the world's largest free trade zone by member state participation.

Indicative projections point that the effective implementation of the AfCFTA could lift 30 million Africans out

of extreme poverty by 2035, while generating an astonishing \$450 billion in increased income across our continent. Furthermore, it holds the potential to boost Africa's exports by a staggering \$560 billion.

There is no denying that Africa possesses vast untapped market potential. By forging a single unified continental market, removing barriers to trade, promoting competition, and facilitating the free movement of people, goods and services, we can catalyse exponential economic growth and development uplifting all Africans.

In this transformative pursuit, the AfCFTA Competition Protocol is an integral component, establishing the vital policy framework and legal architecture to nurture fair competition across our integrated market space. Only through such complementary policies can we fully harness the economic forces of competition as a driver of sustained inclusive progress.

I am truly impressed by the diversity of themes that will be covered during the ACF Workshop. Namely themes like food security, to digital markets and the development of a unified front on regional competition policy at AfCFTA level.

This is testimony that Africa is really thinking out of the box, looking into the future. These are important topics that need to be addressed for the elaboration of an effective competition

regulatory framework, both from national and regional perspectives.

It is indeed commendable that the African Competition Forum is playing a pivotal role in advancing discussions around the AfCFTA Competition Protocol. Fostering collaboration and networking lie at the very heart of the ACF's mandate.

This Forum serves as an essential platform with the primary objectives of:

- Mobilizing and harnessing ideas on how we can collaborate and build networks most efficiently and effectively across our continent;
- Building vital capacity and raising awareness on matters of shared interest in the realm of competition policy and law;
- Perhaps most crucially, translating these collective efforts into substantive, positive impacts that drive competition policy development forward across Africa; and
- By convening the stakeholders and expertise under one umbrella, the African Competition Forum is paving the path toward an integrated, prosperous Africa, underpinned by the principles of free and fair markets benefiting all our citizens as consumers and economic participants.



I am confident that the discussions that will follow during this Workshop will shape the regional policy dialogue for the betterment of our Continent.

It is indeed your joint goodwill and determination as competition agencies – regional and national – that has brought you here today and it is all you need to walk the talk and uphold your commitments, as competition enforcers, *vis-à-vis* your country and our Continent.

I am confident that through your unified efforts as competition authorities, you will collectively generate an impact far greater than the sum of individual initiatives alone. As our economies become increasingly interconnected through globalization, the imperative for efficient cross-border cooperation will only intensify further.

Concomitantly, the role of robust competition regulation and enforcement will take on heightened significance in shaping an integrated, equitable market environment that unlocks opportunities while safeguarding consumer interests across borders. Your joint endeavours today will reverberate positively across future generations as we work in concert to build an Africa characterized by open and fair competition as a foundation for shared prosperity.

**Dear participants,** the ball is in your court.

With these words, it is now my pleasure to declare the African Competition Forum Workshop officially open.

I wish you all fruitful deliberations.

Thank you for your attention.

**Dr. M.C.D.C**