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African Special Economic Zones: Engine for Resilience and Accelerator for Sustainable Industrial Value Chains Development.

Abuja, Nigeria-The African Union Commission (AUC) and the Africa Economic Zones Organization (AEZO) organized the 5th African Union Symposium on Special Economic Zones and Green Industrialization, and the 7th edition of the AEZO Annual Meeting from November 30th to December 2nd, 2022, in Abuja – Nigeria, convened under the theme "African Special Economic Zones: Engine for Resilience and Accelerator for Sustainable Industrial Value Chains Development."

This year's edition paved the way for the celebration of the 30th anniversary of the Special Economic Zones scheme in Nigeria and brought together over 400 delegates representing government officials, ministers, heads of international organizations, eminent experts, academia, policy makers, financial institutions, Economic Zones and Investment & Promotion Agencies representing 38 countries including 52 African economic zones.

The opening ceremony was chaired by H.E Muhammadu Buhari, President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, represented by H.E Umana Okon Umana, Minister of Niger Delta Affairs, H.E Amb. Albert M. Muchanga, African Union Commissioner for Economic Development, Trade, Tourism, Industry and Minerals (ETTİM) and Mr. Ahmed Bennis, Secretary General of The Africa Economic Zones Organization (AEZO).

The ceremony was marked by the statements and goodwill messages of Dr Akinwumi Adesina, President of African Development bank (AfDB), H.E Mr. Adebayo Otunba Niyi, Minister of Industry, Trade and Investment, Nigeria, H.E Mr. Hugues Mbadinga Madiya, Minister of Investment Promotion and Public-Private Partnership, Gabon, Hon. Michael Okyere Baafi, Deputy Minister for Trade and Industry, Republic of Ghana, Prof Adesoji Adesugba CEO & MD of Nigeria Export Processing Zones Authority (NEPZA), Senator Tijjani Yahaya Kaura CEO & MD of Oil & Gas Free Zones Authority (OGFZA) and Mr. Toyin Elegbede, Executive Secretary, Nigeria Economic Zones Association (NEZA).

In his addressed message, H.E Muhammadu Buhari, President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, noted that “We are therefore ready to partner with Special Economic Zones in Africa to benefit from the Africa Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA). I commend the Africa Economic Zones Organization for bringing together operators of free zones in the continent. This will enhance intra African trade and promote peer review among the operators.”

H.E. Amb Albert M. Muchanga Commissioner for Economic Development, Trade, Tourism, Industry and Minerals, African Union Commission stated in his speech that “ Highly Performant Industrial Clusters in Africa such as Special Economic Zones can support Member States and Regional Economic Communities shifting from the commodity export-reliance, which make them vulnerable to exogenous shocks, to a new era of transformative, highly competitive, inclusive, sustainable and private sector-led industrial development framework fully integrated into regional, continental and global value chains.”.

Mr. Ahmed Bennis, Secretary General of The Africa Economic Zones Organization stated “Special Economic Zones can trigger economic policy reforms, by promoting economic diversification and export while preserving domestic linkages. It can provide room for experimenting new policy approaches and regulations in areas like customs, legal, public-private partnership, sustainable development, and green industrialization initiatives.”

On the other hand, Prof. Adesoji Adesugba, the CEO of the Nigeria Export Processing Zones Authority (NEPZA) said “The free zone scheme has indeed opened implausible business opportunities for Nigeria, investors, enterprises and all the key stakeholders in the 30 years of its existence.”

The President of the African Development Bank and representatives of UNIDO and UNCTAD emphasized in their turn the role of SEZs in accelerating sustainable industrial value chains development.

African Special Economic Zones are considered as one of the main instruments that stimulate sound economic reforms, promote quality Foreign direct investments (FDIs), and accelerate industrialization across the continent. According to the African Economic Zones Outlook ([Edition 2021](#)), more than 200 SEZs are operational in Africa while 73 projects have been announced for completion in 47 countries. The land dedicated to SEZs is nearly 150,000 hectares while over \$2.6 billion has been mobilized in investments dedicated to agro-processing, manufacturing and services.

The AEZO Annual Meeting and the 5th AU Symposium on SEZs and Green Industrialization provided guidance on cross cutting issues related to the contribution of SEZs in accelerating sustainable industrial value chains development. This is also aligned

to Africa's [Agenda 2063: Aspiration 1](#): A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development.

After the success of the previous editions in Morocco, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia at the AUC headquarters, and Ghana at the head office of the AfCFTA secretariat, this 7th edition of the annual meeting of Economic Zones was organized in partnership with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the African Development Bank (AfDB) and the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) along with the contribution of local partners as the Nigeria Export Processing Zones Authority (NEPZA), the Nigeria Economic Zones Association (NEZA) and the Oil and Gas Free Zones Authority (OGFZA).

About the African Union Commission

The African Union Commission (AUC) is a continental body that is guided by its vision of "an Integrated, Prosperous and Peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena."

To ensure the realization of its objectives and the attainment of the Pan African Vision of [Agenda 2063](#) was developed as a strategic framework for Africa's long term socio-economic and integrative transformation. Agenda 2063 calls for greater collaboration and support for African led initiatives to ensure the achievement of the aspirations of African people. Learn more about the African Union and Agenda 2063 by visiting www.au.int

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About the Africa Economic Zones Organization (AEZO)

AEZO is a continental association representing leading public and private institutions in charge of the development, management and promotion of Economic Zones in Africa. Founded in November 2015 by Tanger Med Group—Morocco, AEZO is striving to support African Economic Zones projects and strengthen relationships within its ecosystem. AEZO has 82 members representing 42 countries.

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