



Draft Media Statement

Issued on 27th November 2024

AFRICAN SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONES ANNUAL MEETING 2024 OPENS IN NAIROBI, KENYA

the Africa Economic Zones Organization (AEZO), an organization representing African SEZs, and The African Union Commission (AUC), in partnership with the Kenyan Ministry of Investments, Trade, and Industry, have officially launched the *2024 African Special Economic Zones (SEZs) Annual Meeting*. The meeting is taking place at the Kenyatta International Convention Centre (KICC) in Nairobi and will run from 27th to 29th November 2024. This year's event is convened under the theme "***Building Resilient, Inclusive & Sustainable Economies: The Role of African SEZs in Attracting Impactful Investments & Redefining Competitiveness.***"

Over the next three days, this premier gathering brings together more than 400 participants, including ministers, policymakers, senior representatives of the African SEZ community, leading private sector stakeholders, and international organizations. The event provides a unique platform to explore the transformative role of SEZs in advancing Africa's industrialization agenda, fostering economic diversification, and enhancing the continent's participation in global value chains.

The 2024 edition is particularly significant given the shifting dynamics of the global economic landscape. With geopolitical crises, declining FDI inflows, and disruptions in global supply chains presenting both challenges and opportunities. African SEZs hold immense potential to attract impactful investments, catalyze job creation, and drive sustainable industrialization while addressing critical global priorities such as climate action, food security, and digital transformation.

According to the AEZO outlook 2023, Africa is home to more than 250 operational SEZs spanning 200,000 Ha and mobilizing 3.2 trillion dollars in investments, dedicated mainly to Agribusiness, textiles, automotive, and aerospace sectors.

The theme of this 9th edition of the annual meeting highlights the crucial role of African SEZ in attracting significant investments and redefining competitiveness, while promoting resilient, inclusive, and sustainable economies.

The opening ceremony has been marked by the inaugural statement of his excellency H.E Dr William Samoei Ruto C.G.H, President and commander-in-chief of the defense forces of the republic of Kenya followed by insightful speeches and keynote addresses shared by H.E Albert MUCHANGA, African Union Commissioner for economic development, trade,

tourism, industry and mining African; Hon M. Salim MVURYA, cabinet secretary ministry of Investment Trade and Industry; M. Mehdi TAZI RIFFI, President of Africa Economic Zones Organization (AEZO) and Dr. Gunther BEGER, Managing Director SDG innovation and economic transformation at UNIDO..

A Memorandum of Understanding between **Africa Economic Zones Organization (AEZO)** and **the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)** was signed, signifying a commitment to strengthen collaboration and enhance the capacity of SEZs to deliver impactful economic outcomes on the continent.

The program for the following days is designed to provide an in-depth exploration of SEZ-related issues, focusing on innovation, sustainability, and competitiveness. The participants will engage in thematic panel discussions and technical sessions covering topics such as policy imperatives for sustainable SEZ development, the role of SEZs in resilient and inclusive growth and measuring the contribution of SEZs to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). A highlight will be the African SEZs Dialogue session, where experts will share best practices for developing cross-border SEZs and their role in regional value chain integration.

The event will also celebrate excellence within the SEZ ecosystem during the Gala Dinner, which will feature the African SEZs Awards and recognize significant milestones achieved in the past year.

On the final day, participants will benefit from focused consultations on key issues such as SEZs' contributions to local economic development and integration of Micro Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs); their role in accelerating intra-African trade under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) framework; and their potential to attract FDI from Europe. A site visit to some of Kenya's flagship SEZs, including Tatu City SEZ, Konza Technopolis SEZ, North Gate SEZ, and Two Rivers International Finance & Innovation Centre, will provide participants with a firsthand look at best practices in SEZ management and development.

The African SEZs Annual Meeting 2024 represents a pivotal opportunity to redefine Africa's approach to economic zones, equipping them to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing global economy while unlocking their full potential as engines of sustainable development and inclusive growth.

Kenya, the host country of this annual meeting, plays a pivotal role in advancing economic growth and regional integration in East Africa. With its strategic location, robust infrastructure projects like the LAPSET corridor, and a growing network of Special Economic Zones (SEZs). Kenya currently has 12 operational Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and an additional 20 to 30 SEZ projects under development, including the highly anticipated Naivasha Industrial Park and the Mombasa Special Economic Zone.



About AEZO:

Africa Economic Zones Organization (AEZO) is a continental association consisting of leading public and private institutions in charge of the Development, Management and Promotion of Economic Zones in Africa. Since its inception in 2015 by Tanger Med Group (Morocco), Africa Economic Zones Organization (AEZO) has worked towards promoting the African SEZs model to its **93** members representing **46** countries. Alongside its partners, policy makers, and supporting experts, AEZO is guided by its strategic orientations to foster collective knowledge sharing, provide technical assistance, connect with international business networks and promote sustainable economic models and practices.

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Issued by: The African Union Commission (AUC) and the Africa Economic Zones Organization (AEZO)