Opening Speech by Mr. William Carew, Head of the African Union ECOSOCC Secretariat

Multistakeholder Dialogue on Strengthening Africa's Civil Society Role in Global Tax Governance: Combatting Illicit Financial Flows and Enhancing Natural Resource Transparency
Port-Louis, Mauritius – 25th November 2024

Honorable Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade, Republic of Mauritius

H.E. Amb. Dr. Robert Afriyie, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Ghana to the African Union

Mr. Richard Ssewakiryanga, PO Emeritus, ECOSOCC

Kathinka Kurz, Head of Programme, GIZ

Members of the Standing Committee
Distinguished Delegates, Representatives of Civil Society, Development Partners, and Members of the Media,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is both a privilege and a profound responsibility to stand before you today as we convene this crucial Multistakeholder Dialogue. This gathering is not just another meeting—it is a powerful testament to our shared determination to confront the pressing challenges of illicit financial flows (IFFs) and the need for greater transparency in managing Africa's natural resources. These issues directly affect the economic sovereignty, development, and future of our beloved continent.

Allow me to begin by expressing my sincere gratitude to the Government of Mauritius for their warm hospitality and steadfast support in hosting this significant event. Your commitment to advancing Africa's development agenda is deeply appreciated.

I also extend my heartfelt thanks to the many partners and stakeholders who have made this dialogue possible, including the African Union Commission departments, notably the Economic Development, Trade, Industry, and Mining Department (ETIM), the African Union Advisory Board Against Corruption, the African Legal Support Facility, and UN bodies like UNECA.

Civil society champions such as the African Tax Administration Forum (ATAF), the Tax Justice Network (TJNA), Trust Africa, the Global Alliance for Tax Justice, Transparency International, and organizations like Oxfam International, ActionAid, and the Financial Transparency Coalition, among others, have been instrumental in shaping policies on economic and tax governance. Together, we are working toward a collective vision where Africa's resources are used for the benefit of its people, not drained by unfair systems or illicit practices.

Why We Are Here Now.

The adoption of the Terms of Reference (ToRs) for a UN Framework Convention on International Tax Cooperation by the United Nations General Assembly on August 16, 2024, marks a great moment in global tax governance. It represents an unprecedented opportunity for Africa to demand fairer tax rules and address the staggering annual loss of $89 billion due to IFFs—resources that should be building schools, hospitals, and infrastructure across our continent.

Historically, Africa's voice has been marginalized in global tax governance, which has long been dominated by organizations like the OECD. However, the UN Tax Convention presents a unique opportunity to shift this paradigm toward inclusivity, equity, and justice. Our task today is not to duplicate existing efforts but to consolidate and amplify them, ensuring that African civil society speaks with one voice on the global stage.

As ECOSOCC, our mandate is clear. We exist to channel the perspectives of African citizens into the policies and programs of the African Union. This dialogue is a continuation of our work to integrate citizen voices into key policy processes, from peace and security to migration, and now to global tax reforms.

The Power of Collaboration

An African proverb teaches us, *"If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together."* The challenges we face—whether in combating IFFs or advocating for equitable tax governance—are immense. But when we come together, united by purpose and shared values, there is no challenge we cannot overcome.

This dialogue reflects our collective commitment to strategize, learn from one another, and develop actionable policies that safeguard Africa's wealth for its people. It is a declaration that Africa will no longer be a passive observer in global tax governance. Instead, we are here to lead, to shape the narrative, and to demand what is fair and just for our nations.

A Call to Action

Ladies and gentlemen, let us approach this dialogue with the urgency and resolve that these issues demand. I urge each of you to engage openly, share boldly, and collaborate passionately. The recommendations we develop here will serve as a foundation for Africa's position in global tax governance, ensuring that transparency, fairness, and accountability remain at the heart of our efforts.

As another African proverb reminds us, *"When the roots are deep, there is no reason to fear the wind."* Together, let us deepen our roots of unity, purpose, and determination, so that we may turn today's challenges into lasting opportunities for generations to come.

With these words, I declare this Multistakeholder Dialogue officially open. Let us work together to chart a transformative path forward.

Thank you.
Asante Sana. Merci Beaucoup. Shukran.