

# AGOA Mid-Term Review Meeting Kicks off

## At the World Bank Headquarters

/ By: Tsehaye Debalkew, Washington DC, May 30, 2013/

A two-day confab of AGOA /African Growth and Opportunity Act/ Mid-Term Review under the theme "Sustainable Transformation through Trade and Technology" opened here yesterday with the active participation of the leaders of the entire member countries representing the African continent and the African Union Mission to the USA.

In a key note remark he made during the opening session of the Confab, Ambassador Girma Birru, Special Envoy and Ambassador Extra-ordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia to the US and non-resident Ambassador to Canada and Mexico, who is the current Chairperson of the AGOA Consultative Group highlighted the salient objectives of the meeting by declaring;

"This year the objective of our Mid Term Review is to make adequate preparations for the 12<sup>th</sup> AGOA Forum with a view to developing a common African position on the future of Africa/US trade and economic relations.



In his presentation of the core factors that require the utmost attention of the participants of the session the Chairman of the group implored on the occasion that the AGOA Ambassadors Group has now focused its attention to engaging with US partners to work towards the extension of AGOA beyond its expiration in 2015.

The Ambassador further reminded the congregation by underlining the need for a special focus by reiterating that "the importance of the extension of AGOA cannot be overemphasized as the expiration date fast approaches and the window of opportunity for the reauthorization may lie with this hundred thirteenth Congress".



"It is needless to state that the first call should be on immediate reauthorization in order to avoid uncertainty amongst importers and potential investors. It is paramount, therefore, that on our part we should reach into a common understanding of the length of extension by clearly marking a developmental milestone as a threshold. Not to mention the need to adopt a common position for all the possible scenarios that may be examined today to maximize our collective benefit in all kinds of post 2015 arrangements" he emphasized.

In relation to the challenges faced by AGOA the Chairperson in no uncertain words said that there are critical and strategic issues hampering maximization of AGOA benefits. Limitations in capacity, deficiencies in private sector outreach, and lack of awareness about the AGOA benefits are some of the challenges that need to be overcome to reap the benefits of the preferential program, he categorized.

He further went on to enumerate some of the strategic moves that should be adhered to by proposing that "we need to continue to attract US investment into our countries and urge US authorities to offer incentives to US businesses investing in AGOA eligible countries. We are also duty bound to ensure that we do not lose sight of the over-arching objective of increasing trade and economic relations between the U.S and sub-Saharan Africa as a means of improving the livelihoods of our people", he accentuated.

Both sides are indeed obligated to play their respective roles in ensuring the realization of the s objectives under the AGOA framework, Ambassador Girma underscored.



The meeting during its opening day session held the election of the Bureau, deliberated at length on the "Strategic Paper on the Future of the Africa-US Trade and Economic Cooperation, discussed the item of the theme on the status of the preparations of the 12th AGOA Forum, examined possible scenarios for AGOA's post 2015 future, and dealt with the report of the African Ambassadors Working Group.

On the session scheduled for the second day of the conclave it will look into presentations by the American side delving in issues ranging from the outlook of the US Congress of AGOA, US Departments/ Agencies and presentations by the US private sector, Think Tanks and Diaspora. By the end of the two-day confab the meeting is expected to conclude by declaring the outcome and recommendations of the session.

The objective of the Mid Term Review is to make adequate preparations for the 12<sup>th</sup> AGOA Forum which is set to take place during the up-coming mid August 2013 in the wake of the 50th Jubilee Celebrations of the Founding of the OAU/ AU recently marked in Addis Ababa, the continent's capital.