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[Home](#) / [Document Library](#) / [Press Releases](#) / 2006 / April / **U.S.-SACU Agree to Pursue Concrete Steps to Deepen Trade and Investment Relations**

U.S.-SACU Agree to Pursue Concrete Steps to Deepen Trade and Investment Relations

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Pretoria, South Africa - Deputy United States Trade Representative Karan Bhatia met today with senior officials from the member countries of the Southern African Customs Union (SACU) and said the United States remained committed to concluding a comprehensive free trade agreement and, in the near term, to strengthening the U.S.-SACU trade and investment partnership in concrete ways. SACU consists of Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa, and Swaziland.

"Our discussions focused on the best way to move forward on the FTA and how we can build upon and improve our trade partnership more broadly," said Ambassador Bhatia. "To that end, the United States and SACU have agreed-subject to approval by Ministers-to establish a framework through which the Parties will remain vigorously engaged in growing and deepening our bilateral relationship."

"The United States and SACU will develop a joint work program to address a broad range of FTA and other trade- and investment-related issues and, potentially in the near-term, seek to conclude concrete trade and investment-enhancing agreements," added Bhatia.

Ambassador Bhatia explained that the framework would establish a basis and building blocks for pursuing the FTA over the longer term. He noted that the proposed framework would require further consultations within the U.S. government and with U.S. stakeholders, including the private sector.

Background

The United States and SACU launched FTA negotiations in 2003 to secure a more comprehensive and long-term U.S.-SACU trade relationship that would build on the success of the African Growth and Opportunities Act, under which two-way trade between the United States and sub-Saharan Africa has more than doubled.

The United States and SACU have had differences on some core issues in the FTA. These issues will require detailed examinations over the longer term.

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