Kenya and Uganda have agreed to eliminate tariffs and non-tariff barriers that have strained trade relations between the two countries, following directives from Presidents William Ruto and Yoweri Museveni.

The deal was reached after a series of bilateral engagements beginning in July, when the two leaders met in Nairobi and instructed their trade ministers to urgently resolve obstacles slowing cross-border commerce, including congestion along major trade corridors.

Lee Kinyanjui, Kenya's Cabinet Secretary for Investments, Trade and Industry and Wilson Mbadi, Uganda's Minister of Trade, Industry and Cooperatives met in Nairobi on July 31 and exchanged lists of products affected by restrictions. This was followed by a technical meeting in Mbale, Uganda, from Aug. 18 to 22, where officials examined the barriers and carried out joint assessments at border points including Suam, Busia, Malaba and Lwakhakha.

In a joint communiqué, the ministers said they had agreed to scrap discriminatory excise duties, levies and other charges of equivalent effect, and directed border agencies to decongest Malaba and Busia within 24 hours. Truck queues at Malaba are to be kept below four kilometers, while traffic at Busia should not exceed 500 meters.

"All products originating between Kenya and Uganda will now be treated as transfers," the statement said, in a move aimed at easing cargo clearance and boosting trade efficiency.

Uganda also pledged to address bottlenecks at the Malaba weighbridge, while Kenya committed to speed up completion of the Suam One Stop Border Post and upgrade road and scanning facilities at Lwakhakha. The ministers further directed Joint Border Committees to be fully operationalized to handle daily challenges, with unresolved matters escalated to higher authorities.

The measures are expected to support trade between the two neighbors. Uganda is Kenya's largest trading partner and the biggest user of the Port of Mombasa among landlocked countries. In 2024, Ugandan transit volumes accounted for 65.6% of total transit through Mombasa, up from 62.3% the year before, according to the Economic Survey 2025.

Kenya's exports to Uganda were valued at 125.9 billion shillings in 2024, slightly

down from 126.3 billion shillings in 2023, while imports dropped to 37.7 billion shillings from 41.2 billion.

The 1,700-kilometer Northern Corridor, which connects Mombasa to Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, remains the region’s most vital trade route.