The United States intends to remove Rwanda and South Africa from a trade preference programme that gives eligible African countries duty-free access to the US market, with the proposed termination set to take effect on January 1, 2027.

US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer announced the move on November 2, saying President Donald Trump had notified Congress and the governments of both countries of his intention to terminate their participation in the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA).

In a statement, Greer said the decision followed an annual review of sub-Saharan African countries' eligibility for the programme, led by the Office of the United States Trade Representative.

"Based on the review, President Trump found that the governments of Rwanda and South Africa are engaging in practices that are inconsistent with AGOA's eligibility criteria," Greer said.

He cited what the administration described as barriers undermining American trade and investment, as well as practices it considers threats to US national security and foreign policy interests in the region.

The concerns outlined for Rwanda also include the rule of law, political pluralism, internationally recognised worker rights and human rights.

For South Africa, the administration cited barriers to US trade and investment, corruption and concerns relating to American national security and foreign policy interests.

Greer said the administration expected its African partners to take the necessary steps to meet AGOA's eligibility requirements.

The proposed withdrawal would affect Rwanda's participation in a programme that provides eligible sub-Saharan African countries with preferential access to the US market for thousands of products. The preferences are intended to support trade, investment and economic growth by reducing or removing import duties on qualifying goods.

The announcement comes amid wider questions about the future of US-Africa trade relations and the conditions countries must meet to retain preferential access to the American market.

The US statement did not specify the individual measures Rwanda would need to take to address each concern or set out a separate timetable for engagement before the proposed January 2027 deadline.

The termination has been announced as an intention, and the US statement does not indicate that Rwanda’s AGOA benefits have already been withdrawn.