

**REPORT BY THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE WORKING
PARTY ON THE ACCESSION OF LAO PDR
AT GENERAL COUNCIL**

26 October 2012

(Draft)

1. Thank you Madam Chairperson. Thank you Director-General, Pascal Lamy.
2. Let me join you in welcoming Deputy Prime Minister Thongloun SISOULITH and the Delegation of Lao PDR.
3. Today, I am honoured to introduce the Accession Package of Lao PDR and to report on the conclusions and recommendations of this Package for adoption by the General Council.
4. The Lao People's Democratic Republic requested accession to the World Trade Organization in July 1997. The Working Party was established by the General Council in February 1998. The first meeting of the Working Party took place in October 2004. Thereafter, the Working Party met nine times. There were many informal consultations. The Working Party concluded its mandate with the adoption of the Accession Package at its 10th and final Working Party meeting on 28 September 2012.

5. At the beginning of this year, I visited Vientiane and met with Prime Minister Thongsing Thammavong, Ministers and the Lao Negotiating Team. I was encouraged by the determination of the Lao Government in its priority commitment to accede to this Organization. As the Chairperson, it is obvious to me that WTO membership for Lao PDR is not only a label of “Good Trader”, but also integral to the national strategy for sustainable development and prosperity. On behalf of the Membership, I am pleased that the WTO, in partnership with Lao PDR, has accomplished this 2012 Accession Priority. Congratulations to Lao PDR for its success in crossing the finishing line.

6. As the Chairperson of the Working Party, I pay particular tribute to Minister Nam for his leadership, and Vice-Minister Madame Khemmani and the members of the negotiating team for their commitment and dedication. I believe they are world class negotiators who understand the necessity for compromise and flexibility to conclude an agreement.

7. Similarly, I would like to pay tribute to the WTO membership for its hard work, flexibility and goodwill to conclude this accession. I also thank bilateral donors, multilateral organizations and agencies, and individual Members for providing technical assistance to Lao PDR, which was critically important.

8. We must always pay tribute to the good past. In doing so, on

behalf of the entire Organization, I extend our appreciation to my predecessors — and they are also my good friends — Ambassador Geoff Raby (Australia); Ambassador Tim Groser (New Zealand); Ambassador Bruce Gosper (Australia); and, my compatriot Mr. Zhang Xiangchen (China), for their past leadership.

9. As the Chairperson of the Working Party, I would like to place on record my deep appreciation to the Director-General and his staff in the Accessions Division. They made a difference.

10. Over this 15-year period, Lao PDR has undertaken profound domestic reforms and adjustments for its WTO accession. The negotiating team has done an admirable job in this complex and challenging process. As a former WTO accession negotiator for China, I understand the unique challenges of the WTO accession process not only for the acceding government, but also for WTO Members and the WTO Secretariat.

11. Madam Chairperson, the Accession of Lao PDR is the 6th LDC accession, pursuant to Article XII of Marrakesh Agreement Establishing the WTO. It therefore has a particular systemic importance. The Accession of Lao PDR has drawn on the goodwill following the Decision of the General Council to strengthen and streamline the LDCs' Accession Guideline in July. Today's accession of Lao PDR is another success for the WTO in assisting least-developed countries in their effort to join the Organization.

12. The Accession Package before us today is the result of 15 years of hard work and disciplined commitment to domestic reforms. The Package was adopted *ad referendum* by the Working Party at its 10th meeting on 28 September 2012. By this action, the Working Party completed its mandate and forwarded the Package to the General Council for its formal decision.

13. The Accession Package, constituting the terms of entry of Lao PDR into the WTO, is contained in the following documents:

- the Report of the Working Party, circulated in document WT/ACC/LAO/45;
- the Schedule of Concessions and Commitments in Goods, contained in document WT/ACC/LAO/45/Add.1; and
- the Schedule of Specific Commitments in Services in document WT/ACC/LAO/45/Add.2.

14. The Appendix to the Report contains the draft Decision for action by the General Council and the draft Protocol on the Accession of the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

15. In my capacity as the Chairperson of the Working Party, I have the honour to recommend the Report of the Working Party, as well as the draft Decision and the draft Protocol of Accession, for approval by the General Council.

16. Together with Ambassador Steffen Smidt, my friend, Chairman of the Sub-Committee on LDCs, and Mr. Hartmut Röben, Chairman of the Working Party on the Accession of Yemen, we are co-facilitating the accession of Yemen. We are hopeful that, with the continuing support and understanding of Members, our efforts should successfully conclude Yemen's accession this year.

17. Before I conclude, Madam Chairperson, let me take this opportunity to express my sincere congratulations to the Lao People's Democratic Republic, as a traditional friend, a great neighbour and a close development partner of my own country, for the successful conclusion of its WTO accession. It is my great privilege to have served as the Chairperson of the Working Party.

18. Finally, I thank WTO Members for their trust and confidence in me.
