



Statement by His Excellency
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Minister of State, Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs,
and Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries
of The Government of The Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste
as an Observer to
The World Trade Organization

Geneva, Switzerland, 07 December 2016



Your Excellency Ambassador Harald Neple, Chairman of the General Council;

Your Excellency the Director General Roberto Azevêdo;

Your Excellencies Representatives of WTO Member and Observer Governments;

Distinguished Officials of WTO Secretariat;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

It is a great honor for my country, the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, to address this highest level decision making body of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Geneva, for the very first time as an Observer and an acceding government to the WTO. On this historic and auspicious occasion, I express warm greetings from Timorese Authorities to all WTO Members, conveying heartfelt appreciation for your kind decision to grant Observer Status to Timor-Leste and to establish the Working Party on the Accession of Timor-Leste.

WTO accession has been a major governance, institutional building, economic and foreign policy objective of the Government of Timor-Leste. A formal application was submitted in April 2015, after thirteen years of a rather intense state building and human capital development process.

Commencing with the United Nations Transitional Administration and after the restoration of our independence in 2002, we have put in place the necessary institutions to ensure openness, transparency, good governance and the rule of law.



Our country has certainly developed much since Independence. We have more people than ever before; young people who want to work and contribute to their country. The economy is growing and our access to international markets is expanding. Businesses want to come to Timor-Leste, and other countries want to trade and buy our products.

We have strived hard to build a multiparty democracy and a peaceful, stable and secure society where a free market economy is growing in strength be able to participate in global trade and to promote a better and brighter future for Timorese People.

Active citizenship and a culture of development action is taking root in our society to help us achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and revenue mobilization. This is being fortified by the economic and fiscal reform programs of the Government.

Excelencies,

Our desire to join the World Trade Organization and the Association of Southeast Asia Nations has strengthened our resolve to anticipate our preparation to participate in this multilateral and regional body. To this end we have implemented a forward-looking Customs Reform that has restructured the customs organization, established a new Customs Authority, passed a modern Customs Code based on international conventions to facilitate trade and adopted the Arusha Declaration revised to promote integrity and transparency in the new Customs Authority.

I am delighted to inform that Timor-Leste is in the process of establishing a National Single Window that will streamline and automate all trade related procedures to improve efficiency and significantly reduce customs clearance time to one hour. Our vision is to



promote a National Single Window for the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries to bolster and facilitate our trade, and that can in the future potentially link CPLP to the ASEAN Region. This initiative can exponentially grow access to market and trade to benefit all involved.

Timor-Leste prioritizes WTO membership, as it would help to leverage the on-going improvements in its infrastructure, human capital, and administrative capacity, to accelerate growth and economic diversification. It would be a complimentary process to Timor-Leste's accession to ASEAN. Timor-Leste is fully committed to abide by the principles, objectives and rules of the World Trade Organization (WTO), as a *Least Developed Country (LDC)*, and to implement domestic structural, legislative and policy reforms needed to comply with its future WTO commitments, to be defined in accordance with Article XII of the Marrakesh Agreement.

Concrete actions have already been taken to give consistency and coherence to such words. The national inter-ministerial Working Group on WTO Accession, comprising Senior Cabinet Members and line Directors, has been in place since October and working hard. In this context, I would also like to thank the Director-General and the WTO Secretariat for the technical assistance provided to our Government in advance of this meeting, which allowed putting forward the Application for Accession to Members today.

Ladies and Gentlemen,



Timor-Leste Strategic Development Plan 2011-2030, aims to transform our country from a low-income country to an upper-middle-income country by 2030, with a healthy, well-educated population.

Timor-Leste is open and ready for business and trade! The objective of a diversified growing economy has led the Government to engage in proactive policies to attract and stimulate investment in the productive areas of the economy, such as agriculture, fisheries, tourism, light manufacturing, and mining, besides downstream oil and gas; while improving economic infrastructure; and improving the business environment.

We are very much aware that trade will help Timor-Leste create sustainable jobs, raise incomes and improve peoples' lives.

By establishing the Working Party on the Accession of Timor-Leste, the General Council has greatly encouraged us to persevere and stay on track with our nation building and reform initiatives and to grow in confidence for a better future of continued progress, development and economic transformation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are engaged and stand ready to implement all reforms based on international best practices necessary to accede to the WTO. We welcome the establishment of the Working Party and hope to immediately start accession negotiations, to come back, as soon as possible, to address you all as a full Member. To that end, with pleasure, I am happy to announce that, the Working Group has started the preparation of the negotiating inputs of the Working Party. Timor-Leste's *Memorandum on Foreign Trade*



Regime (MFTR) is now ready and will be formally submitted to WTO Secretariat for circulation to Members in the coming weeks. As a Least Developed Country, we look forward to working closely with Members and the WTO Secretariat.

Mr. Chairman,

Excellencies,

This is indeed a historic moment for Timor-Leste! Please accept our highest appreciation and consideration of your warm welcome as well as for the encouragements and support we have received from Members, the Director General and, the Accession Division of the WTO Secretariat. I would also like to pay tribute to the Enhanced Integrated Framework Secretariat, for their engagement and support.

We count on your continued solidarity and cooperation! Thank you very much!

Eng. Estanislau Aleixo da Silva,
Minister of State, Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs,
and Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries

Geneva, 07 December 2016