

**SECOND REGIONAL DIALOGUE ON WTO ACCESSIONS FOR THE GREATER
HORN OF AFRICA**

TRADE FOR PEACE THROUGH WTO ACCESSIONS

Opening Remarks

by Ambassador Alan Wm. Wolff, Deputy Director-General, WTO

3 December 2018, Djibouti

*Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Good morning.

Introductory remarks

On behalf of the WTO, it is a pleasure to extend a warm welcome to all participants of the Second Regional Dialogue on WTO Accessions for the Greater Horn of Africa. We appreciate the International Trade Centre, our partner organization, joining with us to make this event possible, and especially for its arranging the participation of representatives of the business community as well as a number of specialized experts.

Djibouti's Strategic Location in the Horn of Africa

My special appreciation is due to the Government of Djibouti for giving us its warm and gracious welcome.

Djibouti occupies one of the most strategic locations not only for the Horn of Africa but also for the world for trade, security, and humanitarian activities. Djibouti is a key node in the Gulf of Aden and Suez Canal routes, which respectively account for approximately 20%¹ and 10%² of global trade. This country offers sea access to landlocked states in the region, especially Ethiopia - 90% of maritime trade for its approximately 100 million population. Djibouti also hosts to facilitate anti-terrorism and anti-piracy operations,³ military bases of major powers in the world including the United States, China, Japan, Germany, France and Italy.

¹ Heba Saleh, The Financial Times, *Egypt aims to profit from the Suez Canal*, 30th May 2017 <https://www.ft.com/content/2f6a3d18-1ae0-11e7-a266-12672483791a>

² European Union Naval Force Somalia Operation Atalanta, *Information Booklet*, http://www.eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/csdp/missions-and-operations/eu-navfor-somalia/pdf/eunavfor_brochure_en.pdf

³ Ibid 1 (Oladipo, Abdi, Ben Ho)

With this Dialogue, a joint initiative of countries in the region, the Government of Djibouti is demonstrating what is required to sustain the multilateral trading system. Especially at a time when the system is facing challenges in all its functions, it is the responsibility of every single Member, regardless of its level of development, to make a net positive contribution to the system. This is indeed the essence of WTO Reform debate today. Making investments in WTO Accession generate one of the greatest dividends to the system. Each accession is the reaffirmation of the fundamental values and principles embodied in the system, and each accession strengthens the system.

WTO accession is a collective responsibility of all Members, and one of the most important features of the world trading system. It is also one of its finest features, demonstrating a desire to welcome new Members.

Recent Developments in the Greater Horn of Africa since the first Dialogue

The Greater Horn of Africa, with the largest concentration of Acceding Governments in Africa, is a region of strategic importance to the WTO. This is particularly true, for WTO Members as they are reminded of the origin of the multilateral trading system, which is founded on the promise that trade opening and integration is a key ingredient for fostering peace. This gathering is timely and significant as it is happening in the region where the promise of "trade for peace" is now being implemented through WTO accession.

Regionally, the international community welcomed the swift turnaround in developments within the region through a series of initiatives leading to rapprochement which include:

- The signing of a peace agreement between Eritrea and Ethiopia in September 2018 in Saudi Arabia as well as the restoration of diplomatic ties that ended decades of hostilities.
- The restoration of diplomatic ties between Eritrea and Somalia after the signing of an agreement in July 2018 in Djibouti;

- An agreement to normalise ties between Eritrea and Djibouti signed in September 2018 in Djibouti, ending a decade-long conflict;
- The signing of a Tripartite Cooperation Agreement amongst Eritrea, Somalia and Ethiopia in September 2018 in Eritrea;
- The signing of a peace agreement between the government of South Sudan and the main rebel factions in September 2018, formally ending a civil war that commenced in 2013; and,
- The lifting of decades old arms embargoes, travel bans, asset freezes and other targeted sanctions on individuals and certain groups imposed on Eritrea by the United Nations Security Council in November 2018.

Another milestone with great potential is the official signing of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) in March 2018 – the largest free trade area in the world. This agreement which has can contribute substantially to lifting millions out of poverty through enhanced market access opportunities and more efficient allocation of resources. All nine African Acceding Governments⁴ are part of this important undertaking. Their WTO accession process can enhance the benefits of this regional agreement.

Accessions demonstrate the dynamism and promise of the WTO. At the 10th Ministerial Conference held in December 2015, in Nairobi, Kenya, Trade Ministers welcomed Liberia and Afghanistan to the WTO family as the 163rd and the 164th Members. At the 11th WTO Ministerial Conference in Buenos Aires, WTO Members agreed to establish the Working party on the accession of South Sudan.

In the African region, acceding governments are making substantial progress. Currently, both Somalia and South Sudan are each in the process of finalizing their Memorandum on the Foreign Trade Regime (MFTR). Comoros held its fourth Working Party meeting earlier this year. Domestically, significant structural and institutional reforms took place in Sudan and

⁴ Algeria, Comoros, Ethiopia, Equatorial Guinea, Libya, Sao Tomé and Príncipe, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan.

Ethiopia. Sudan has been undertaking important reforms to remove WTO-inconsistent measures and Ethiopia, under the new reformist government led by H.E. Prime Minister Ahmed Abiy, has been undertaking positive steps towards further trade liberalization. All of these governments have recently appointed new Ministers in charge of WTO accession, and we at the WTO Secretariat welcome the opportunity to work with them. I am sure that, over the next 4 days, they will detail accounts of the progress registered in their respective accessions and how they intend to take the process forward.

Why Trade for Peace?

The theme of this year's Dialogue "Trade for Peace through WTO Accessions" is particularly appropriate. The founding principle of the WTO, and the GATT system before it, is to promote peace. The post-World War II era saw the creation of a fair and inclusive trading system as a mechanism to reconstruct the war-torn world, and provide for economic development through equal access for all, leaving behind a world characterized by discrimination and warfare. Those who created the multilateral trading system envisaged interdependencies being formed among countries as a result of trade, with a consequent decrease in the likelihood of tensions and conflict. At the same time, they recognized that peace created a conducive environment for economic cooperation and prosperity. In continuing that tradition, the comprehensive reform process associated with the WTO accession creates a useful framework for economic recovery, resilience and the promotion of peace.

Recently acceded LDCs, such as Afghanistan, Liberia, and Yemen, have used the rigorous accession process to establish credible economic and legal systems to promote transparency, the rule of law and good governance. The current set of acceding governments, many of which faced specific challenges associated with fragility and conflict, can heavily benefit from their experiences. It is for this reason that platforms such as this Regional Dialogue remain invaluable. By launching a platform for interaction among accession negotiators, it seeks to create an enabling environment that spark conversations, enrich debates, and encourage the exchange of useful information.

The WTO Secretariat assists in providing a platform for conflict-afflicted acceding governments to share experiences and help each other progress. The theme of today's dialogue is a culmination of a series of activities on Trade for Peace since MC11 when the g7+ WTO Accession Group was launched. This group is a sub-group of the larger g7+ and comprises of conflict afflicted Acceding Governments (Comoros, Sao Tome and Principe, Somalia, South Sudan and Timor-Leste) and WTO Members (Afghanistan, Liberia and Yemen). The activities held in Geneva thus far include:

- A seminar on WTO Accessions – Building Peace Through Trade, held on 19 September;
- During this year's WTO Public Forum, on October 4th of this year, a program on Trade for Peace in 2030: Integration of Fragile States as a Pathway Towards Peace and Resilience; and,
- A session, on 9 November, during Geneva Peace Week on WTO Accession for Peace and Nation-building.

Programme of the Dialogue and Concluding Remarks

Turning to this week's programme, in addition to addressing trade for peace, substantive discussions will take place on the WTO accession process. Acceding governments will be able to learn from their peers who are in the process of acceding as well as from those who have concluded the accession process. We will also have for the first time, representatives of the private sector give their perspectives on WTO accession. Participants will also benefit from a specialised training organized by ITC on "Launching a National Brand". On Wednesday, we will adopt an outcome document that hopefully will prompt leaders in the Horn of Africa, WTO Members and development partners to promote peace by building economic relationships through WTO accessions and deeper regional integration.

Trade does not prevent war. It does not guarantee peace. It does give peace a better chance. What you do here this week is of great importance not only to you as the participants but you help to make the world a better place.

Thank you.

