

g7+ WTO ACCESSIONS GROUP

STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR XIANGCHEN ZHANG, DEPUTY DIRECTOR-GENERAL, WTO

5 October 2021, 3:00 P.M.

Venue: Centre William Rappard, Room W / Zoom

Dear Excellency - Minister Mawine G. Diggs
Your Excellency - Mr Habib Ur Rehman Mayar, Deputy General-Secretary of the g7+

Distinguished Ambassadors, colleagues, and friends

1. Thank you very much for the invitation to join the meeting of the g7+ WTO Accessions Group. Let me start with an apology from Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala who could not join us, although she would have like to be with you today. This is especially true for the DG coming from Nigeria who witnessed civil strife first-hand, the issue of fragility has been very close to her heart as an individual and as a professional. As she said in March at one of the Trade for Peace events:

"The challenges of state fragility have figured prominently throughout my career, whether at the World Bank where I oversaw a landmark study on the most vulnerable economies or as Nigeria's Finance Minister."

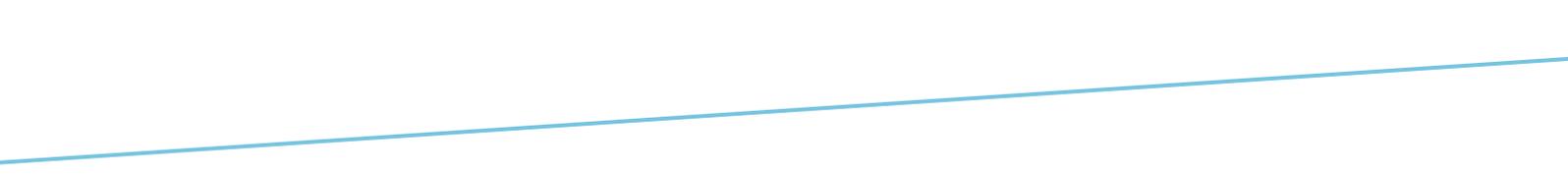
You may also have heard the DG speaking at the Opening Plenary of the 2021 Geneva Trade Week last week, where she acknowledged the role played by this Group in launching the Trade for Peace Initiative. I am sure that she will look for an opportunity in the near future to interact directly with the Group. On my part, I shall report back to her on this meeting upon her return to Geneva.

2. On my part, since taking up the post of Deputy Director-General in May, I have been immersed into the world of Trade for Peace and have been impressed by the vision, energy and support around the Trade for Peace Initiative, now Programme. I also participated in several activities with great interest. Let me start by commending the g7+ WTO Accessions Group for raising the relevance of the role of trade, the multilateral trading system and WTO membership in contributing to peacebuilding and for bringing the special challenges faced by fragile and conflict-affected states (FCS) to the attention of WTO membership. I can confirm that the Group's voice is being heard by WTO Membership.

3. Based on what I have just heard from Minister Diggs, the Group is ready to step up its efforts to advance the Trade for Peace agenda, in the lead-up to MC12. I can assure you of the full support of the WTO Secretariat in assisting the Group in realising its vision for Trade for Peace.
4. Let me take this opportunity to brief you on the state of play on Trade for Peace, where the Group has made contributions on various fronts. The reality today is that what started as a gathering of eight Ministers from FCS in December 2017 in Buenos Aires, has now expanded into a prominent WTO Trade for Peace Programme that is supported by many outside of this room – WTO Members and partners from the trade, peace and humanitarian communities who have started to break down the usual bureaucratic silos which have prevented us from delivering for peace on the ground, especially in FCS.
5. Between 2018 and 2020, in collaboration with many partners, including the g7+ WTO Accessions Group, the WTO Secretariat has organised a number of outreach activities aimed at deepening understanding of the nexus between trade and peace. One of such activities was the first edition of the Trade for Peace Week held last December, which brought together 59 high-level speakers and over 600 participants in ten webinar sessions exploring new dimensions of Trade for Peace and specific countries/regions.
6. In response to the growing interest, in March this year, we inaugurated the Trade for Peace Network as a structured cooperation mechanism between the three communities aimed to support FCS, on the basis of the White Paper which is being developed. Since then, activities under the Trade for Peace Programme are being implemented under four pillars: (i) political engagement and partnerships; (ii) outreach and dialogue; (iii) research, and (iv) training and capacity building. Let me give an illustrative list of activities which have been undertaken in recent months.
7. Under Pillar 1 on political engagement and institutional partnership, the Secretariat has held a number of productive meetings with organisations within the trade, peace and humanitarian communities, building on earlier or new contacts. These included, *inter alia*, the UN Peacebuilding Commission, the Graduate Institute, the International Committee on Red Cross (ICRC), the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), the United Nations Office of the Special Advisor on Africa (OSAA), the International Labour Organisation (ILO), and the Public International Law & Policy Group (PILPG) to name a few. Together, we are working to identify and strengthen areas of collaboration.
8. Under Pillar 2 on outreach and dialogue, we have worked to further expand the reach and depth of the discussion on trade and peace through several events, such as the 2021 UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in July and, most recently, the 2021 Geneva Trade Week. As part of this pillar, we also launched the Trade for Peace Podcast hosted by Mr. Axel M. Addy, former Minister of Commerce and Industry and Chief Negotiator for WTO accession of Liberia. This innovative tool has helped to bring forward the voices of trade for peace champions

around the world, including policy makers and the voices from the ground. We have aired 14 episodes so far.

9. Under Pillar 3 on research, our goal is to generate and deepen knowledge on the linkages between trade and peace. To this end, we have established a "Research and Knowledge Hub", as a subset of the Trade for Peace Network. The Hub first met in July where experts from various institutions exchanged on the areas of potential research. As a follow up to this meeting, a call for papers on Trade for Peace was issued which is open until 15 October. The selected papers will be featured in a new publication on Trade for Peace, and some will be presented at the Trade for Peace Conference tentatively scheduled for early 2022. In addition, we are working on the creation of a Trade for Peace index with the Institute for Economics and Peace, which we hope to report progress on at the second meeting of the Hub, tentatively planned for 19 October.
10. Finally, under Pillar 4, which is training and capacity building, our goal is to foster mutual learning and experience sharing among trade experts and peace practitioners. Progress on the research pillar will lay out a solid ground to initiate training and capacity building activities.
11. I do hope that the direction in which the Programme is evolving gives us all confidence that these support efforts will be continued and sustained by the large family of partners that are now all connected and engaged as a network. You have a large group of like-minded supporters.
12. I understand, however, that there is still a lot to be done, particularly in stepping up the g7+ initiative and securing recognition and commitment by WTO Members – especially for those of you who remain outside of the WTO in this difficult COVID time and need to advance on their WTO accessions – e.g., Comoros, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Sao Tome & Principe and Timor-Leste.
13. Speaking of these accessions, I should say that, we are much impressed by the efforts that are being made by these governments – this may also be attributed to Liberia which inspired them to by its example. In particular, we are pleased with the concrete progress registered for three LDCs – Sudan, Timor-Leste and Comoros – in recent months, as they held their respective Working Party meetings. Of these, Comoros' accession is the most advanced and is now a near-term deliverable, ripe for conclusion in 2022; while Sudan and Timor-Leste rapidly move to the stage of negotiating their specific accessions commitments, while also engaging with Members on market access bilaterally. Despite their challenging circumstances, LDC accessions are currently the most active, dynamic and energetic in driving the Organisation's universality goal.
14. Let me conclude by commending once again the work of the Group and madam Chair, for your leadership. I agree with you and the Group that it is the right moment to push for the Trade for Peace agenda as the WTO strives to become more inclusive and relevant to all people, including the most vulnerable. The Director-General always reminds us that: "Trade is about people". And for people, what can be more important than peace?



15. I thus very much look forward to our discussion today. I am happy to respond to any questions by the Group and yourself.

16. Thank you.
