



The Republic of Sudan

Ministry of Trade and Supply

Opening Statement

by

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at

**the 5th Working Party Meeting
of Sudan's Accession to the WTO**

Geneva, Khartoum (Hybrid), 26th July 2021

H.E Mr. Katsuro Nagai – Chairperson of the Working Party
H.E Ambassador Xiangchen Zhang - Deputy Director General of WTO
Excellencies and distinguished delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen

Today, I am honored to address this august meeting of the long-awaited 5th Working Party meeting on the accession of Sudan to the WTO. It is timely and important. It is also worth celebrating this occasion particularly as it comes soon after Sudan has been granted cancellation of 14.1 billion USD of its foreign debts from Paris Club after reaching the decision point of the HIPC initiative.

This initiative comes in recognition of the genuine commitment and strong track record of critical economic reforms undertaken by the Transitional Government under the leadership of His Excellency Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok despite existing challenges. Allow me, Mr. Chair, to express our thanks and appreciation to all those who supported Sudan throughout this prolonged accession negotiations process.

At the outset, allow me to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to delegations from member states for their active participation and continuous support for Sudan's accession process, which is now in its 27th year. Let me also thank you, Mr. Chair, for your guidance and leadership throughout your mandate.

We are sorry to learn that you are leaving Geneva after completion of your tenure soon next month. Please allow me, Mr. Chair, to wish you all the best for your future endeavors and to assure you that your extraordinary work will be remembered. Also, through you, I would like to convey our sincere gratitude to the Government of Japan for its support and we wish it will continue its assistance to Sudan.

It is my pleasure to welcome H.E Ambassador Zhang, Deputy Director General of the WTO, and to take this opportunity to congratulate him and wish him all success. Sudan looks forward to working closely with him.

Mr. Chair

Let me also thank my delegation who has been exerting all possible efforts to make this meeting possible through continuous work in preparation of the relevant documents presented to this meeting, since the Informal Working Party held in March 2021.

My delegation comprises of a distinguished team of senior government officials and experts from a range of Ministries and government agencies. They have demonstrated Sudan's renewed commitment to reactivate its accession process to the WTO.

My sincere appreciation goes to the Accession Division and the Secretariat of the WTO for their relentless support and guidance and facilitating the organization of this meeting. Last but not least, the Permanent Mission of Sudan in Geneva for follow up and close coordination.

Excellencies and distinguished delegates

The Transitional Government, led by Prime Minister Abdallah Hamdok, is mandated to pave the way for full democratic rule towards the end of the transitional period in 2023. Sudan is at a historic crossroads, with the prospect of moving away from internal strife and external conflict toward greater economic growth that can underwrite political stability.

Sudan adopted the Three-Year Programme for Sustainable Peace and Economic Stability (2021-2023). The government has put in place reform agenda focused on achieving internal peace based on inclusion, regional equity, and justice; removing economic distortions, stabilizing the economy, correcting significant macroeconomic imbalances; and providing a foundation for future rapid growth, sustainable development, and poverty reduction.

Sudan has illustrated that, in the wake of revolutionary change and in the midst of a global pandemic, WTO accession remains a clear priority to drive its economic reforms and integration into the global economy. Sudan has not only remained firm in its commitment to accede to the WTO, but it has increased its momentum, reflecting the resilience, strength and will of the Sudanese people.

The Transitional Government has placed economic reforms as one of top priorities and WTO accession is one of the vehicles to drive this agenda through Sudan's integration into the global economy. Sudan has already embarked into serious reforms, despite the impact of the pandemic which exacerbated the economic hardship, causing a loss of 40% of public revenues. Among these painful reforms was the removal of the costly subsidies on energy, intended to meet the requirement of strong track record of macroeconomic performance to reach the decision point for debt relief.

Sudan has made tangible progress on the IMF-supported reform program despite difficult economic conditions compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, and a challenging humanitarian situation. Sudan believes that accession to WTO is significant for the diversification and modernization of its economy and boost investment attractiveness. It will stimulate economic growth and address key development challenges.

We believe that WTO agreements, as the main source of legitimacy in trade policy making, can be used as an instrument to make radical changes in both policies and institutions and fixing the ailing economy and combatting corruption. The economy would benefit from being part of the global value chain.

The Paris Conference held last May, organized by French President Emmanuel Macron to support the Sudan's transition towards democracy, with a remarkable participation of Heads of State and Government, Heads of International Financial Institutions, Foreign Ministers, was a great milestone to Sudan towards its reintegration in the international community, launching the country's debt relief process and encouraging private investments. This process was culminated as I stated earlier with successfully reaching the decision point and made Sudan eligible to debt relief under the HIPC initiative.

Mr. Chair

Since March, Sudan circulated many important documents, as requested by the Working Party at its Informal Meeting which are required for the full resumption of Sudan's accession process and to hold today's 5th meeting of the Working Party.

These include Revised Market Access Offers in both Goods and Services, Revised Checklists in the areas of SPS, TBT and Customs Valuation as well as a Revised Questionnaire on Import Licensing Procedures. In addition, we Revised Domestic Support and Export Subsidies provided for the Agricultural Sector, for the period of 2017-2019. Moreover, we worked with the Secretariat to update, the Factual Summary to reflect changes to the trade regime since 2019.

In addition, Sudan submitted a Revised Legislative Action Plan (LAP) with new laws marking great signals of the path towards an open economy. Some of the most recent legislations relevant for the improvement of the trading and investment environment that have been approved are: the Anti-Corruption Law 2020 and the creation of an Anti-Corruption Commission; the new Investment Law 2021; the Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) Law 2021, the Law of Multiple Amendments: Approval of Dual Financial System: Traditional and Islamic, and the Law of cancelation of the Law of Boycott of Israel 2021.

In addition, Sudan has shared draft legislation for the protection of intellectual property rights with the Working Party and it is going to share the draft Trade Facilitation Act which had been finalized recently. Nonetheless, there are still difficulties facing the legislative process. The formation of legislative council is reliant on on-going peace process, aimed at achieving sustainable inclusive internal peace.

The Transitional Government has adopted a comprehensive approach to take all parties on board, and despite progress made so far, a few factions are yet to sign the peace agreement and the talks are ongoing with them.

The formation of a Legislative Council that represents all Sudanese will follow. Meanwhile, the Transitional Government in accordance with the Constitutional Documents has introduced an alternative body to approve some laws and regulations through the Joint Council of both the Sovereign Council and the Council of Ministers as a matter of urgency.

We understand that there are two documents that we have yet to provide to the Working Party: A Revised Questionnaire on State-Trade Enterprises and a document on the Implementation of the TRIPS Agreement. We are still working on these documents with all relevant parties.

In this juncture I would like to confirm to members who have had some concerns on SoEs, and STEs that things have changed and Sudan will be highly committed to the principles of transparency in notifying and updating the said documents. Therefore, our request to members of the Working Party to postpone discussions on Paras (64 – 82) in the Factual Summary on SoEs, privatization and STEs up to the next Working Party and it should be noted that para 82 should be deleted as we are going to submit the revised document before next Working Party.

On the bilateral front, Sudan has so far concluded market access agreements with six Members - Brazil, China and India in 2017, Japan and Nigeria in (April) 2018 and Kenya subject to signature. Sudan is currently finalizing negotiations with two Members and looks forward to concluding with three additional Members as soon as possible. Sudan availed itself for bilateral meetings for several weeks for interested Members.

Excellencies and distinguished delegates

I would like to stress the importance of technical assistance and support of the Members in Sudan's accession process. Let me refer to the 2002 General Council Decision on LDC Accessions Guidelines and its 2012 addendum which highlighted the importance of timely provision of technical assistance. As an LDC, Sudan urges WTO members to facilitate and accelerate its accession process and to provide the necessary flexibilities and most needed technical assistance.

Recalling last March, I presided over a Roundtable with Development Partners where Sudan presented priority accession-specific technical assistance needs. (15 International organizations and development partners were present. We would like to thank the international community, in particular the EU and the US, which have followed up with Sudan and offered to provide support.

In closing, let me reiterate my thanks and appreciation to you Mr. Chair and to the accession division and to all members of the WTO for their support and to the working group members. I would like to thank all friends of Sudan who offered technical assistance to Sudan. As part of our commitment to accession, Sudan is looking forward to hosting the Fourth Regional Dialogue for African acceding countries in Khartoum when an in-person conference will be possible, probably before the end of the year.

Since 2017, Sudan has participated in all three Regional Dialogues which have provided a unique platform for discussion and experience-sharing among all African acceding governments on policy issues, such as the linkages between WTO accession negotiations and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), and the role of trade in promoting peace.

Finally let me stress that Sudan exerted much efforts to join the multilateral trading system for the sake of adopting principles of transparency, non discrimination, equity and fairness to reap the benefits of an open economy.

Thank you all for your attention.