INFORMAL GROUP OF ACCEDING GOVERNMENTS (IGAG) MINISTERIAL MEETING AT MC13

STATEMENT BY ZHANG XIANGCHEN, DEPUTY DIRECTOR-GENERAL (WTO)

Monday, 26 February 2024 – 15:00 – 16:30 PM
HALL 4 ROOM A, ADNEC – ABU DHABI, UAE

1 DRAFT STATEMENT

Excellency Mr. Jamshid Khodjaev, Deputy Prime Minister of Uzbekistan,
Excellency Mr. Miguel Marques Gonçalves Manetelu, Minister of Transport and Communication of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste,
Excellencies, Honourable Ministers,
Good afternoon.

1. It is my pleasure to address the Informal Group of Acceding Governments at its first Ministerial meeting, on the occasion of the 13th Ministerial Conference. I would like to thank Deputy Prime Minister Jamshid Khodjaev for convening this meeting and express my gratitude to Uzbekistan for coordinating this Group at a time when Accessions are firmly back on the WTO agenda - as we saw this morning.

2. Let me extend my heartfelt congratulations to Comoros and Timor-Leste, and their negotiating teams for the great achievements. Witnessing the Signing Ceremonies was very moving for me as a former accession negotiator. I was standing next to my minister for the signing of China's Protocol of Accession at the Doha Ministerial Conference in 2001. I know personally that WTO membership can change the trajectory of a country's economic development, if one keeps investing in capacity and institutions.

3. For the WTO, it was a beautiful way to start this Ministerial Conference, injecting a positive spirit right from the beginning. The accession of these two LDCs, which are also fragile and conflict-affected states (FCS), sends a

strong signal about the importance and relevance of the values and principles embodied within the rules-based multilateral trading system. As we navigate challenging times, this positive news cannot be taken for granted.

4. For Acceding Governments in this room, Comoros and Timor-Leste have demonstrated that, with strong political commitment and hard work, challenges can be overcome and accessions can be concluded with the support of Members and the international community. As the DG said this morning, we should not wait for a long time to welcome other new members. She has instructed me and the Accessions Division to support Acceding Governments who want to use WTO accession to drive domestic reform, institution-building and economic transformation. I am sure that Members will be also supportive of your efforts, as they see accessions as a win-win-win for all – the acceding governments, Members and the multilateral trading system.

5. I would like to commend the efforts of Acceding Governments, as many of you face significant challenges domestically, on the external front, or most likely both. But what is encouraging is that a number of Acceding Governments have become very active during the last one to two years. The presence of a high number of Ministers from acceding governments at MC13 is an indication of their active interest in advancing their accession negotiations, including through various contacts and networking opportunities here in Abu Dhabi. The IGAG meeting is one such opportunity and indeed a very valuable one. Let me commend the leadership role played by Uzbekistan in this regard. There is plenty to learn from each other by sharing information and discussing experiences and negotiating techniques. I am eager to listen to your views and concerns, including suggestions aimed at the Secretariat, and hope that we can collectively look for the best ways to address them.

6. With these words, let me conclude my statement. Thank you.

_____