

10TH CHINA ROUND TABLE ON WTO ACCESSIONS

10 YEARS OF CAPACITY-BUILDING UNDER THE CHINA PROGRAMME

REFLECTIONS ON LDC ACCESSIONS

High-level Session: Future of LDC Accessions

Tuesday, 18 January 2022

12:00 – 12:30 Virtual, Zoom

Opening Remarks by the Honourable Mawine G. Diggs, Minister of Commerce and Industry, Liberia, and Co-coordinator of the g7+ WTO Accessions Group

WTO Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala,
Minister Wang of China,
Minister Kampard of Chad,
Ministers and Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to participate in the High-Level opening session of the 10th China Round Table.

At the outset, let me thank the Government of China for its dedicated and consistent support provided to LDCs, especially acceding LDCs, through the China Programme. First as acceding LDC, and then as LDC Member, Liberia has been a beneficiary of the support provided under the programme –

including the China Round Tables (which Liberia participated since the first one in Beijing in 2012), the Internship Programme (which trained one of my staff in the Ministry) and a series of post-accession activities to help Liberia implement its accession commitments, especially on notifications. This is my first China Round Table, which I had hoped to join in person last November, but let me use this opportunity to convey the appreciation of the Government of Liberia for all the valuable support provided during our accession and post-accession.

As you know, Liberia joined the WTO in 2016 – as one of the latest Members. Our path to WTO Membership was not easy. Liberia was acceding to the WTO not only as an LDC, but also as a fragile and conflict affected state that got hit by the Ebola epidemic at the height of the accession negotiations, after years of civil war. For us, WTO membership meant a path to peace and stability and it has worked. But of course, there is no doubt that Liberia still faces many challenges at multiple fronts, including to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic fallout.

With this strong belief that WTO Membership can work for peace, Liberia has been advocating for the Trade for Peace agenda in the WTO, together with other fragile and conflict affected LDCs in the g7+ WTO Accessions Group, which we are currently coordinating with Timor-Leste.

The Group was established in late 2017 during MC11, and has brought together nine fragile and conflict-affected LDCs associated with WTO

accession - Afghanistan, Comoros, Liberia, Sao Tomé and Príncipe, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Timor-Leste and Yemen. Having suffered from civil wars or various types of conflicts, we feel strongly that trade and economic integration provides a better chance to overcome our fragility and help in our transition to stability, and maintain peace. Over the last few years, the Group has been encouraged by the support received for our Trade for Peace vision, not only from a wider set of FCS, but now also from many parts of the WTO membership.

In this regard, I would like to welcome the personal involvement of Director-General Ngozi, who is one of the pioneers of the work on FCS during her time at the World Bank, for her understanding of our special need and challenges and her support.

Ahead of MC12 which had to be postponed, the Group submitted a proposal on the establishment of an action-oriented work programme on Trade for Peace in the WTO. We believe that this work programme can help deepen our understanding of the relationship between trade and peace and how the integration into the multilateral trading system can contribute to peace and stability, especially in FCS.

In this context, the Group welcomes the Trade for Peace Programme launched by the WTO Secretariat, in partnership with our Group, building on various activities implemented under its four pillars, namely: (i) political

engagement and institutional partnerships; (ii) public dialogue and outreach activities; iii) research; and (iv) capacity building and training.

The Group looks forward to positive consideration on our proposal by WTO Ministers at MC12, whenever it is convened this year. We believe that such action would send a strong signal to the world that the multilateral trading system is indeed inclusive and sensitive to the needs of the most vulnerable members of the international community. The Group would also like to request the Government of China to extend its support to the Group's efforts, including through the expansion of activities under the China Programme, as six of the eight remaining acceding LDCs are classified as FCS by the World Bank¹, in addition to the recently acceded LDCs including Afghanistan and Yemen.

With these short remarks, I would like to end my intervention by reiterating the full support of the g7+ WTO Accessions Group to advance the remaining accessions, especially of those FCS, and the Trade for Peace agenda in the WTO.

Thank you and I wish you successful deliberations!

¹ Comoros, Ethiopia, Sao Tome & Principe, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Timor-Leste.