



REGIONAL DIALOGUE ON WTO ACCESSIONS FOR THE GREATER HORN OF AFRICA

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OPENING REMARKS

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Her Excellency Ambassador Amina Mohamed, Cabinet
Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kenya,
Professor Peter Mbithi, Vice-Chancellor of the University of
Nairobi,
Honourable Ministers from the Acceding Governments and the
WTO Members
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning. On behalf of WTO Director-General Roberto Azevêdo, I would like to extend my warm welcome to all participants of the **Regional Dialogue on WTO Accessions for the Greater Horn of Africa**. It is indeed my great pleasure to see many of friends and colleagues coming from Geneva and the capitals of the Acceding Governments. Special thanks to those who had to adjust their summer holiday plans to join us here in Nairobi.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the Government of Kenya for initiating and hosting this event, in partnership with the University of Nairobi. I cannot think of any better place to hold this event than in Nairobi, where WTO Members, at their 10th Ministerial Conference twenty months ago, laid the foundation for a stronger Multilateral Trading System with the conclusion of the accessions of Liberia and Afghanistan.

Indeed, it was in this same venue, Mara Ball Room, where the African Ministers pre-celebrated these two LDC accessions at the Fourth China Round Table event, just before the Nairobi Ministerial Conference. At the same event, with the participation of President Kenyatta of the Republic of Kenya, African Ministers debated on their Perspectives of the Future of the Multilateral Trading System, in particular, how they could contribute to shaping the future direction and the agenda of the WTO.

Turning to the Dialogue which we are starting today, this is the first time we are discussing WTO accessions with a specific focus on Africa. This is indeed the first initiative by an African country for African accessions. Kenya – Cabinet Secretary Mohamed and Ambassador Karau in Geneva, in particular - deserve all the credit for the idea and leadership for this event. Let me explain why.

At present, Africa, with 44 Members, represents over a quarter of the WTO membership. Since the establishment of the Organization in 1995, the WTO family has been expanded by 36 additional Members, to a total of 164 Members today. However, Africa constitutes less than 10% of this family expansion, as so far, only three African countries – Cabo Verde (2008), Seychelles (2015) and Liberia (2016) i.e. two islands and one LDC – have concluded their WTO accessions successfully.

Given this, today, 8 out of the 21 countries seeking WTO membership are African. Some of them are quite large and significant, whether in terms of territory, population or the size of economy. The Greater Horn of Africa constitutes one of the largest concentrations of countries outside the WTO today. This is why I applaud the initiative by Kenya, as a responsible WTO Member, to hold this Regional Dialogue to support its neighbours' efforts to join the WTO. After all, accession is the collective responsibility of all WTO Members, not only the business of acceding countries.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This Regional Dialogue is not only a noble African contribution to strengthening the Multilateral Trading System, but also, it is very timely. Accession activities from this region have intensified since the Nairobi Ministerial Conference, especially since the second half of 2016, which we often attribute to the "Liberian effect".

The accession experience of Liberia - which we will have an opportunity to hear directly from the Liberian Commerce Minister and former Chief Negotiator Axel Addy during this Dialogue - has inspired many of the Acceding Governments which had been inactive for many years to think about reactivation of their accessions, or to put WTO accession

applications forward. This "Liberian" effect has had an impact not only in this region and Africa as a whole, but also across the world of remaining accessions, from the Caribbean, Middle East, Central, South and South East Asia, to the Pacific islands.

Together with the accession of Afghanistan, which is another post-conflict LDC, the conclusion of Liberia's accession to the WTO at Nairobi MC10 has sent one clear lesson: despite enormous domestic challenges an Acceding Government may face, you can actually finish your accession within a reasonable period of time, if one is focused, and equipped with "right ingredients", which we refer to as "Accession Best Practices" derived from the 36 concluded accessions.

Turning to this region, Comoros whose accession process started two months before that of Liberia in 2007, has re-activated its activities during last year. In fact, a conversation about reactivation started with a failed attempt to schedule a meeting between the WTO Director-General and the Vice President of Comoros, who later became the Chief Negotiator, during the UNCTAD-14 Conference, here in Nairobi, in July last year. Since then, the Comorian team has worked intensively, held two Working Party meetings, and last month, concluded several bilateral market access negotiations. And now, they are very focused to conclude their accession in the coming months.

The accession of Sudan is one of the longest running accessions as the process started back in 1994. After more than a decade of dormancy, Sudan started a conversation about its reactivation, again, here in Nairobi on the margins of MC10. Half year later, in July last year, Sudan officially announced the reactivation of its accession process to the entire WTO membership at a meeting of the General Council. This was followed by an intensive work of updating their documentation. This year, Sudan had two Working Party meetings to register concrete progress, and concluded two bilateral market access negotiations so far.

Ethiopia started its accession process in 2003, held 3 Working Party meetings in 2008, 2011 and 2012, but since then, there has been no activity at the level of the Working Party. A conversation about reactivation started this year, first at the Fifth China Round Table in Siem Reap, Cambodia in March, and I was privileged to visit Minister Bukana and Chief Negotiator Mekonnen in Addis in April to follow up on that conversation. We look forward to hearing more from Minister Bukana on his Government's plan about Ethiopia's accession bid at this Dialogue.

Somalia is one of the latest applicants to start the accession process in December last year, after its application letter was first submitted during Nairobi MC10 – actually, it was in this Mara Ball Room when my former Director and myself

met with the former Trade Minister of Somalia. This Regional Dialogue offers a first opportunity to interact with the Somali team, led by new Trade Minister Dualeh, to start and discuss the preparation for its accession process, as a Chief Negotiator has recently been appointed.

My team and I will spend two additional days with the Somali team after the Dialogue to start the preparation of a Memorandum on Somalia's Foreign Trade Regime, which will be the base document to kick off the accession negotiations.

Finally, South Sudan has recently expressed its intention to submit an application for WTO Accession, so that they can also start the accession process. We are very pleased to have Minister Ayet and his team with us in Nairobi, thanks to the funding provided by the Enhanced Integrated Framework. We hope that this Dialogue provides a first opportunity for South Sudan to hear directly from its neighbours which have gone through the various stages of the WTO accession process, which could help them decide on their way forward.

Today, we are privileged to have amongst us, Ministers and high-level representatives of these Acceding Governments. Their presence here is a testimony to the importance they attach to WTO accession and the associated values to the process. I hope that over the next three days, this Dialogue

will inject further impetus to their respective accession processes.

Ladies and gentlemen

WTO accession is a process of domestic reforms, accompanied by adjustments in the legal and policy frameworks governing the trade and economic policy-making of an Acceding Government. While this process can be long, demanding and often daunting, most, if not all, Governments that have gone through this process before, including several of them in this room, can testify that at the end, WTO accession has done some good for them, as it was a part of their domestic reform agenda to modernise and transform their economies.

According to the last year's Director General's Annual Report on WTO Accessions, the trade performance of the Article XII Members consistently has surpassed that of the original WTO Members, registering an average annual growth rate of 10.6 per cent, over 6.2 per cent by the original Members, since the establishment of the WTO. Even if we exclude the largest Article XII Member by trade volume, which is China, the trade growth of the other Article XII Members was still 20 per cent faster than the global growth rate.

This is the reason why this Dialogue has brought together former Chief Negotiators and officials who were directly and deeply engaged in different WTO accessions. We have amongst us today:

- Commerce Minister Axel Addy of Liberia, whom I already mentioned earlier;
- Ambassador Zhang Xiangchen of China, Permanent Representative to the WTO, who was part of the Chinese negotiating team which successfully led the conclusion of their accession process in 2001 and later served as Chairperson for the accession of Lao PDR;
- Ms. Hilda Al-Hinai, Deputy Permanent Representative of Oman, who also successfully negotiated the accession of her country to the WTO in 2000, and later served as Chairperson for the accession of Seychelles;
- Ms. Cillia Mangroo from Seychelles, who was also from the negotiating team which concluded the accession in December 2014; and,
- Mr. Nagib Hamim from Yemen who is not only from the negotiating team which concluded the accession in December 2013. As focal point on accessions of the

WTO LDC Group, he has also been a passionate advocate of the importance of facilitating LDC accessions, as well as providing post-accession support to LDCs.

I am very grateful for their presence here in Nairobi to make themselves available at the service of the Acceding Governments in this room, for experience sharing and advice.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Apart from the exchange on the process and the substance of WTO accessions, one new aspect which this Regional Dialogue will focus on is the linkage between Accession-Related Domestic Reforms and Regional Integration. All the Acceding Governments, plus South Sudan, are involved in several ongoing initiatives towards deepening regional economic integration, whether continent wide or specific to this part of Africa.

This Regional Dialogue will offer a first opportunity to explore synergies and policy coherence in trade policy making between the national, regional and multilateral levels, which would be critical not only in shaping future trade agenda, but also in promoting peace and stability in the region.

This is why we are lucky to have amongst us partners which are supportive of these objectives. These include the representatives from the African Development Bank, the Islamic Development Bank, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the World Bank, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), and the Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF). These partners will not only share their perspectives on the linkage between regional integration and the WTO, but they would also present their menu of possible support and assistance to respond to the specific needs of the Acceding Governments.

In conclusion, let me thank our host once again for providing this unique and timely opportunity for substantive, forward-looking discussion which would contribute to Members' preparation for the upcoming Ministerial Conference. An outcome document which summarizes main points emerging from the three days of deliberation will be forwarded to the WTO membership, as well as to the Ministerial Conference, immediately after this Dialogue, by the host country, on behalf of the participants.

I look forward to interactive discussions with all participants over the next three days.

Thank you.

