



Statement of H.E Ambassador Omar HILALE, Chair of the working group on Iraq's accession to the WTO

Second High-Level Regional Dialogue on WTO Accessions for the Arab Region SESSION 5 – TRADE FOR PEACE THROUGH WTO ACCESSION

Wednesday 9 February

7:00-8:30 (EST)/13:00-14:30 (CET)

*Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,
Good morning from New York,*

I'm delighted to take part of the second High-Level Dialogue on WTO Accession for the Arab Region on my capacity as the Chair of the working group on Iraq's accession to the WTO.

I welcome the continuity of this Dialogue since its first successful organization in 2020 and I would like to congratulate and thank the WTO Secretariat, the Arab Monetary Fund, and the Islamic Development Bank for organizing this timely meeting.

Special thanks to Ms. Maika Oshikawa, Director of the Accessions Division of WTO and her team for the continuous efforts and tremendous support given to all accession working groups. I have personally witnessed the personal engagement and the remarkable enthusiasm of Ms. Maika in the processes of accession, which is helping not only the chairs of the working groups but also the concerned acceding countries and their teams.

Ms. Maika, Thank you again.

As we have witnessed in 2020, **this panel dedicated to: "Trade for Peace" remains a crucial** occasion to remind us of one of most important correlations within the multilateral trading system, which is the role of trade in peacebuilding and sustaining peace in the Arab region through the accession to the World Trade Organization.

As you are aware, the UN Charter describes four areas that are the pillars of the United Nations: Peace and Security; Human Rights; The Rule of Law; and Development.

These pillars are **interconnected**, and their fulfilment requires an implementation in a synergetic manner. **Among these synergies, we find the following:** i) On one hand, achieving peace is enshrined in the spirit of the multilateral trading system under the auspices of WTO and ii) on the other hand, achieving

peace is also articulated in the overarching 2030 Agenda for sustainable development which confirms that there is no peace without development and no development without peace.

In this regard, I would like to pay a special tribute and salute the progress achieved on the trade for peace within the WTO under the iconic leadership of the Director General Madame OKONJO-IWEALA. We are lucky to have a WTO DG that truly believes in this nexus and who is a strong advocate for supporting the world's least-developed and conflict-affected countries and for enabling trade to nurture peace and peacebuilding.

And here, allow me to quote some of the words mentioned by DG Okonjo during the launch of the discussion on trade for peace at Geneva Trade week in September 2021: ***“Trade and peace are completely intertwined in the history of the multilateral trading system ... and yet they are not often mentioned in tandem. Each has its own community and constituency”***. She also mentioned that Trade, poverty, and peace remain intricately connected. **The World Bank estimates that by 2030, up to two-thirds of the world's people in extreme poverty will be living in the 30 or so fragile and conflict-affected (FCA) countries.** *Source*¹

Furthermore, and as was highlighted in a very interesting podcast few days ago (3 February 22), in the WTO trade for peace podcasts, **we need to leverage the power and the role of Trade in defrosting frozen conflicts**. This is perfectly applicable in the Arab region context, in which Several Arab acceding governments to the World Trade Organization are fragile and conflict affected.

Engaging in the multilateral trading system through the accession to WTO can and should play a central role in enabling Arab economic prosperity and human resilience and sustaining peace.

Excellencies,

Of the 22 members of the Arab League, **13 Arab countries**² are WTO members, and **eight countries are in the process of accession**³. Many of the countries in the Arab region and in particular these acceding countries continue to face the multifaceted challenges including, climate change impacts, desertification, food insecurity, unemployment and the socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic that are exacerbated by conflict and post-conflict situations.

In this regard, we can all agree on the fact that we have no choice but to strengthen multilateralism at all levels, **including multilateral trade under WTO**, and put all the necessary efforts to ensure an inclusive, resilient, and **meaningful recovery in the Arab region**.

The pandemic's difficulties should not discourage the accessing countries in the region, but rather an incentive to accelerate the path towards the accession. The situation due to the crisis should not serve at a pretext to do less or to be discouraged.

¹ https://www.wto.org/english/news_e/news21_e/acc_27sep21_e.htm

² The Kingdom of Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, the State of Kuwait, Mauritania, Morocco, Qatar, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, the Kingdom of Jordan, the Sultanate of Oman, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Yemen.

³ Algeria, Comoros, Iraq, Lebanese Republic, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and Syrian Arab Republic), accounting for more than one third of ongoing WTO accessions.

In the current context, it is timelier than never to enhance multistakeholder partnerships and cooperation, to undertake the needed reforms and institutional policies, to create the needed structures for enhancing their international trade capacity and to prepare the needed documents for the accession process to the WTO. This an important exercise that will serve these countries both internally and in their international engagement within the accession process mechanism.

As the Chair of the working group on Iraq's accession to the WTO, I can't stress enough the vital element of ensuring capacity building and technical assistance for Iraq and all the acceding countries in the Arab region, to succeed their accession process to WTO, and thus accelerating the peacebuilding in the fragile areas of the region.

It goes without saying that the acceding countries can't achieve the process alone, every acceding country needs to be tooled and technically ready to negotiate its accession. Therefore, I reiterate the call on all our WTO member states, our partners in the World Bank and all relevant stakeholders to assist Iraq and other countries in their accession process, by engaging in sharing experiences, providing technical assistance, training to negotiators, and scaling up trade experts' profiles.

A word of appreciation and congratulations to the International Trade Central and our development partners which continue to be of utmost support to acceding countries, including Iraq. I have closely witnessed the openness, availability, and the spirit of cooperation of the ITC teams which continued to make all necessary efforts, they traveled to Bagdad during the most complicated times in order to keep up the support for the Iraqi experts.

*Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen.*

When I said that COVID-19 situation should not be an obstacle, I am clearly basing my statement on facts and factual events. During the past 2 years, I have made three working visits to Geneva in order to accelerate the negotiation process.

Thanks to the political will of Iraq, the constructive engagement and support from partners, the continuous assistance and support of WTO accession division, I am closely witnessing, the progress and the evolution of the accession process through the submission to WTO secretariat of the pending negotiation documents. Last September 2021, Iraq has officially submitted the responses to the 267 questions from Members and the revised memorandum on the foreign trade regime among other important documents.

I'm confident that the political will joined by the acceleration of the administrative and jurisdictional reforms, Iraq and the other acceding Arab countries will be at closer steps from the accession to the organization, which will give the opportunity to engage on a process of openness on its regional and international environment and thus, ensuring sustaining peace and moving forward with the country's efforts for sustainable development in all its tree dimensions.

The summit hosted by Iraq last year was a significant step forward to enhance regional cooperation and to ease regional tensions. Most of the countries who participated in this summit are WTO members. More impetus and political empowerment will be given to such commendable initiative after successful accession to WTO of Iraq and the other countries of the regions through enhancing the common denominator of regional and multilateral trading system and thus, consolidation peace and security.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before concluding, I would like to raise an important point that is also an integral part of the discussion of this panel which is **the partnership between the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission and WTO, in particular its accession division**. In the past two years, the discussion around this partnership has gained a good momentum which needs to be fostered this year.

The PBC and the Peace Building Support Office also works very closely with the World Bank on drivers of conflicts and fragility, as well as with many other key partners. WTO should be one of them.

There is need to learn from the practices and support given by PBSO in the Sahel region for example and duplicate similar assistance in the Arab countries in conflict and post conflict situation with the focus on the Trade sector. I am Glad and honored to be conducted as Chair of the Central African Republic country configuration. I'm actively engaged in all the activities of the PBC and would like to assure you of my full engagement and **support in developing PBC-WTO partnership**.

Finally, I would like to conclude by the following 6 recommendations:

- 1- Trade for peace is a crucial nexus and a realistic interlinkage that needs to be fostered at the national levels in the accessing countries to WTO.**
- 2- It is important to recognize the impact of trade on peacebuilding and sustaining peace, it is now time to strengthen this evidence by multiplying concrete initiatives, actions and programs to help fragile States put trade at the forefront of their priorities.**
- 3- Climate change related security risks is at the forefront of the challenges facing the Arab region. I believe it is high time to include this component in the upcoming discussions of the trade-nexus and think about targeted solution to diminish the effect of climate change on trading systems in the Arab region.**
- 4- The acceding countries from the Arab region must remain at the heart of the attention and benefit from stronger support in term capacity building and technical assistance.**
- 5- As coherence and synergies are the pillars of any successful process, I truly believe that it is important to convene as soon as possible an in person joint meeting among the chairs of the acceding Arab countries to WTO. The Arab region shares similar challenges, this meeting could also give birth to a peer-learning platform and sharing experiences among the Arab countries acceding countries to WTO and thus stimulate the process of accession in a proactive manner.**
- 6- And finally, it is timely to also convene with the assistance of the accession Division of WTO a joint meeting between the acceding Arab countries and the heads of the intentional financial institutions IMF and World Bank in order to have a frank exchange on how to enhance national policies, and on what is working and what is not working in terms of the assistance provided.**

Dialogue and frequent conversation within acceding countries and with development partners are always helpful to move forward and move faster with the accession process to WTO. Thank you for your attention.