

## **Speaking notes by Ms Hilda Ali Al-Hinai (Oman), former Working Party Chairperson on the Accession of Seychelles**

### **Session 4 – Role of Chairpersons**

#### **Fifth China Round Table, 20-23 March 2017, Siem Reap, Cambodia**

I would like to start by thanking the Government of Cambodia, the Government of China and the WTO Accessions Division for inviting me to participate in the 5<sup>th</sup> China Round Table on Accessions. This is my fourth time in the China Round Table and it has always been a valuable experience.

1. I think the first thing a Chair of any Accession Working Party should do is to know the geography, economy, history and politics of the country he/she is going to chair. Also he should know about the regional economic agreements the country is a member to or is going to join. This information is very important in understanding the overall situation of the acceding country and the challenges that the Chair might face during the process.

2. Important for the Chair to understand all the steps, process and arrangements of accession (MFTR, Factual Summary, Draft WP Report, WP on accession, also the bilateral and Multilateral processes) and how they affect each other to advance the negotiations process.

3. The Chair should establish good relations and trust with the acceding country officials, with members, and with the Accessions Division staff. It is of paramount importance to have close relations with all parties involved in the accession process to make the job easier for the Chair.

4. The Chair should consult with the acceding government to understand their needs (financial or technical) and guide them to where they can avail themselves of the assistance required. To provide an example, in the case of the assistance that MC provides to the private sector especially SMEs, I took the initiative to bring to the attention of Seychelles' officials about the services that ITC provides to SMEs whom they did approach.

5. The Chair has to understand the sensitivities of both sides and be prepared to deal with any raising political issues and tensions between parties.

When people are under pressure they can be very sensitive. The Chair has to stay calm and ready to bridge the differences between the acceding government and members. Sometimes the differences or tension can be between the acceding country negotiators and the WTO Accessions Division officials. So the Chair has to deal with that situation as well. Misunderstandings and mistrust can reach very high levels sometimes, especially as the pressure builds up because deadline for the targeted date for conclusion of accession negotiations becomes closer.

6. It is important for the Chair to know the targeted date for accession so he/she can work accordingly. WTO is a member-driven organization and of course at the end of the day the final decision on any accession will depend on the results of negotiations but the Chair has to

try to work according to the timetable and a plan that is agreed on by members and acceding government. The Chair has to try to make everyone stick to the schedule.

7. The Chair should help the negotiating team in its efforts to lobby and gain support for accession, by visiting the acceding country and meeting with stakeholders (private sector, academia, parliamentarians, ministers, civil society and media). Help to explain the benefits and address their concerns and share the Chair's country experience in dealing with different issues.

8. Lobby on behalf of the acceding country among WTO Members who do not wish to have bilateral negotiations with the acceding country for their political support (regional groupings as well as individual members).

9. The Chair should keep continuous contact with Accessions Division to follow up on progress and deal with any difficulties or challenges that face the accession process (political, technical or financial).

10. The Chair should be neutral, understand concerns of both parties and should represent acceding country and members at the same time.

11. Check with Members of the Working Party (those who do not engage in bilateral negotiations with acceding country), check with them their views on accession and make sure they do not appear at a late stage of negotiations and request bilateral negotiations.