

Statement by

Mr. Azanaw Tadesse Abreha, Minister Counsellor, Permanent
Mission of Ethiopia in Geneva

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in WTO Accessions For Least Developed Countries

On Session 3: Best Practices – Domestic Preparation and
Coordination

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Thank you Mr. Chairman,

I would like to thank the People and Government of the People's Republic of China for organizing this Round Table and for the invitation extended to me to take part in it. I would also like to thank the WTO and in particular the Accession Division Headed by Mr. Chiedu Osakwe for co-organizing this meeting.

The issues that this session is allotted to cover include:

- Preparing impact assessments—potential impact and benefits
- Creating a coordinating institutional structure for decision making on WTO accession
- Appointment of Chief Negotiator and composition of a negotiating team
- Cooperation with Parliament, business sectors and the general public for “ownership”; and
- Coordination and collaboration among government agencies

I will try to address briefly all the topics in the order they are inscribed on the programme, with the exception of the last topic that is coordination and collaboration among government agencies which will be covered early on. By way of introduction though, I would like to say that Ethiopia attaches high priority to the accession process to the WTO, and thus accession is addressed at the highest level with a Council of Ministers decision clearly providing for effective coordination and follow-up of the accession process.

Preparing impact assessments—potential impact and benefits

A number of impact studies have been conducted to assess the potential benefits and the costs that would arise from joining the WTO. Thus 12 different Committees were established to conduct assessment studies on different agreements of the WTO. These studies concluded that on balance acceding to the WTO was beneficial and that acceding to the WTO would support the country's development priorities, policies and strategies. Once a clear position was adopted based on the impact assessment studies, the next step was to set clear strategy for negotiation and

an accompanying work plan. However, it has to be noted that the preparation of impact assessment is not a one-time affair; it evolves overtime throughout the accession process. Therefore, as the accession process evolves additional impact studies on different activities have been conducted to assess the impact of joining the WTO. In this connection, thus far, about 20 more studies ranging from agriculture to TRIPS have been undertaken with support from different bilateral and multilateral partners.

Impact assessment studies are conducted by research institutions and consultants. Examples include the Ethiopian Development and Research Institute and the Addis Ababa University. These are validated by the technical committee and reviewed by the steering committee.

In addition to the preparation of analytical studies on potential benefits and costs of acceding to the WTO, perhaps a unique feature of the initial stage of Ethiopia's application for accession is the fact that it had undertaken what is referred to as autonomous liberalization in the WTO parlance. This implied that most of the liberalization that would have occurred during the accession process was already undertaken. So, there existed already conducive atmosphere for seamless incorporation of unilateral domestic trade and economic policy reforms that were undertaken during the course of the 1990s and in the 2000s in the documents presented for our accession process. These reforms have also been part of our explanations for the WTO members. In order to maintain the trajectory established for completing the accession process, the drafting of new laws or amendments to existing laws is checked, systematically as we will see in the next topic, to ascertain its consistency with WTO rules.

Creating a coordinating institutional structure for decision making on WTO accession

A structure for the effectively coordinating and leading Ethiopia's accession to the World Trade Organization was established by a decision of the Council of Ministers. Thus a National Steering Committee on Accession to the WTO composed of seven ministries and or government institutions was established. The decision provides that the Prime Minister designates the Chairman of the Steering Committee who will be the Chief Negotiator and Leader. H.E. Ato Mekonnen Manayazewal, the Minister of Industry is appointed as the Chairman of the National Steering Committee and thus is the Chief Negotiator for Ethiopia's accession. The mandate of the national steering committee include, among others:

- Leads the country's negotiations on accession to the WTO;
- Identifies and submits draft decisions on trade related matters with legal or policy changes for adoption by the Council of Ministers;
- Decides on recommendations submitted by the Technical Committee on negotiation positions and policy related technical matters; and

- If during the accession process it is necessary to issue new policy or law or amend existing policies or laws, it would recommend that these be drafted by the relevant government institution;

The Council of Ministers decision provides for an effective coordination between the relevant government institutions in the accession process. The coordination of government institutions is therefore inbuilt in the institutional architecture for accession. Thus the decision provides for, and experience thus far has shown that, there is a very strong sense of collective purpose and a very smooth working relationship and collaboration in the accession process. This has been enhanced not only because the membership of the most Senior government official in the National Steering Committee from the relevant government institutions but also through the designation of a member of the Technical Committee from each of the member institutions of the Steering Committee.

Technical Committee

In addition to the National Steering Committee, a Technical Committee is established as part of the national institutional structure on accession to the WTO. The Technical Committee is composed of experts drawn from government institutions, the private sector, the academic and research institutions. Some of the tasks assigned to the Technical Committee include:

- Preparation of Ethiopia's negotiation positions and all necessary documentation for Ethiopia's accession;
- Preparation of impact analysis on accession negotiations and validation of impact analysis studies conducted by other institutions and draws recommendations for submission to the Steering Committee;
- Verifying consistency of all laws and regulation to be issued by government institutions with WTO rules and provides inputs if necessary; and
- Providing support to the National Steering Committee on all technical matters on the accession process.

Composition of a negotiating team

As I mentioned above the Chairperson of the National Steering Committee is also the Chief Negotiator of Ethiopia's accession to the WTO. The members of the Steering Committee are also members of the negotiating team. As Chairperson of the Steering Committee and in his capacity as Chief Negotiator, depending on the nature of the negotiations, the Chief Negotiator can designate from the members of the Technical Committee a negotiating team. Thus the

negotiating team is composed of the Steering Committee members with a supporting negotiating role assigned to the members of the Technical Committee. This has proven quite effective in both the multilateral setting with members of the Working Party and the bilateral settings.

Finally, in terms of cooperation with the business sectors and the general public for “ownership” an outreach programme was launched with a view to familiarize the business community. Thus far workshops, seminars, etc. were held in 18 cities to train regional Chambers of Commerce. We have an action plan to expand these activities.

Thank you for your kind attention.