

Statement of H.E Ambassador Omar HILALE

Chairman of the Working Party on the Accession of Iraq to the World Trade Organization

High Level Regional Dialogue on WTO Accessions for Arab Region

Session 6: Trade for Peace

10 November 2020

6:45 AM New York time

I'm delighted to take part of this High-Level Dialogue on WTO Accession for the Arab Region.

I would like to congratulate and thank the WTO Secretariat, the Arab Monetary Fund and the Islamic Development Bank for organizing this timely meeting. A special thanks to the division on accessions of WTO for their continuous efforts and their supports for all working groups.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This panel, dedicated to: "Trade for Peace" is a crucial occasion to highlight one of most important correlations within the multilateral trading system, **which is the contribution of trade in peacebuilding and sustaining peace in the Arab region.**

The complicated situation due to the pandemic should not be seen as a pessimist horizon. Instead, **the current context must be an opportunity to foster multilateralism, at all levels, for building back better in the Arab region, strengthening the economies, building peace and security and acceleration the implementation of the 2030 agenda as we started the decade of action for delivery on the Sustainable Development Goals.**

Excellencies,

Trade has always been an engine for development. There is no peace without development and no development without peace. Hence, I believe that we need to give specific attention to the crucial importance of the triple nexus: Trade-Peace-Development.

Several Arab acceding governments to the World Trade Organization are fragile and conflict affected. Engaging in the multilateral trading system can and should play a central role in enabling Arab economic prosperity and human resilience in a post-pandemic world.

In this context, I would like to recall the importance of "Trade for Peace" initiative, launched in December 2017 at the 11th WTO Ministerial Conference in Buenos Aires. This initiative *is today highly relevant in the COVID era and beyond.* There is a need to catalyze its potential in order to use the WTO accession process as **pathway to economic growth and development, fundamental elements for national, regional and international peace and security.**

As the Chair of the working group on Iraq's accession to the WTO, I've witnessed closely, **the pertinence of the accession process in engaging the acceding country in ambitious economic reform** that has the capacity to unleash faster growth, create jobs, and strengthening the institutions.

After several years of war and the fight against terrorism DAECH and Al-KAIDA, Iraq won this battle and defeated all of them. **The impacts of these difficult situations, exacerbated by the oil price shock and the COVID-19 pandemic, have pushed the country into a difficult situation of fragility, lack of jobs, declining of the economic growth and social difficulties.**

Iraq is today at a crossroads, and in a crucial phase of reconstruction aiming not only to save the economy of the country but also focusing on sustainable development in its economic, social and environmental dimensions and achieving the prosperity and well-being of Iraqi people. This cannot be achieved without a reactivation of the economic and trade activity at the regional level. **Moreover, the integration of Iraq in its regional economic architecture and the global market is also crucial, I would say vital, to its path towards economic growth and sustainability.**

I must confess that I'm impressed by the resilience and the determination of the Iraqi people and authorities. Despite all the challenges they were facing, they continued tirelessly the process of the accession in order to submit to WTO secretariat the pending negotiation documents and the preparation of the revised memorandum of the foreign trade regime.

In this context, **I wish to stress that the acceleration of Iraq's accession to WTO will help the country to engage in structural reforms through international binding commitments and would allow the country to benefit from a rules-based transparent and predictable multilateral trading system.**

The accession to WTO is of utmost importance for the diversification and the modernization of its economy, strengthening infrastructure, and boosting investments attractiveness. Furthermore, this accession is crucial for launching a GLOBAL partnership with all WTO member States, which will give Iraq 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.

Excellencies,

The process of Iraq's accession to the WTO **was reinforced recently by encouraging signals**, especially after the formation of the new Government of Mr. Mustapha Al Kadimi. The new Government is determined to fight against corruption, and to initiate several reforms in the country, including at **the level of the justice system as well as the establishment of the economic transition** which is vital in order not to rely on the oil sector as main source of Iraq's Gross National Product. **Reforms in trade policy and trade facilitation** are also crucial for promoting regional peace and stability.

Developing a strong national Agricultural sector is also as a real mean of stimulating the economic growth for the post conflict reconstruction. Moving from a basic agricultural sector to an agri-food system will help ensuring food security in Iraq and building resilience to conflict not only through coping and recovery mechanisms, but also through supporting sustainable development more broadly.

Having said that, **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, in order to succeed their accession process to WTO**, and thus accelerating the peacebuilding in the fragile areas of the region.

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 call on all our WTO member states, our partners in the World Bank and all relevant stakeholders to assist Iraq and others countries in their accession process, by engaging in sharing experiences, providing technical assistance, training to negotiators, and scaling up trade experts profiles.

*Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Finally, I would like to conclude by focusing on the potential partnership between the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission and WTO, in particular its accession division. Indeed, we feel there is a great potential in encouraging such a partnership. The PBC 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.

To try to briefly put everything in its context, **the PBC is an intergovernmental advisory body that supports peace efforts in conflict affected countries and is a key addition to the capacity of the International Community in the broad peace agenda.** It is mandated to focus on the 3 following points:

- 1- to bring together all relevant actors to marshal resources and to advise on and propose integrated strategies for post-conflict peacebuilding and recovery;
- 2- to focus attention on the reconstruction and institution-building efforts necessary for recovery from conflict and to support the development of integrated strategies in order to lay the foundation for sustainable development;
- 3- to provide recommendations and information to improve the coordination of all relevant actors within and outside the United Nations, to develop best practices, to help to ensure predictable financing for early recovery activities and to extend the period of attention given by the international community to post conflict recovery.

Given its mandate and activities, we see a great potential in launching this new partnership. In my capacity 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 this new partnership.

Speaking about the CAR, a country plagued with violence and instability for decades, the situation is slowly improving, on many fronts. However, trade is still a major concern, especially with the potential of the country. Today, Trade is one of the three pillars of the 2017-2021 National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan, the RCPCA. **This pillar focuses on ensuring economic recovery and the revival of the country's production sectors. Despite having gathered most of the budget needed for the implementation of the RCPCA, which reaches 3 billion US Dollars for 5 years, trade is still not considered a priority in a country where security challenges are still impeding the return to stability.**

To conclude, 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.

Thank you for your attention.