

**FOURTH CHINA ROUND TABLE**  
**NAIROBI, KENYA,13-14 DECEMBER 2015**  
SPECIAL SESSION ON LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES, WTO  
ACCESSIONS AND POST-ACCESSION, DOMESTIC REFORMS AND  
THE BENEFITS OF WTO MEMBERSHIP  
STATEMENT BY H.E. MR. TOFAIL AHMED  
MINISTER OF COMMERCE OF BANGLADESH  
COORDINATOR OF THE LDCS' CONSULTATIVE GROUP

*"LDCs Accessions - Achievements to Date"*

Hon'able Chairman,

Esteemed Ministers

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen-- Good morning.

At the outset, I would like to thank the Government of China for the specific assistance provided to LDC Members and Acceding Governments through the "China LDCs' and Accessions Programme". Since its inception, the China Programme has yielded tangible results in technical assistance and capacity building in trade policy and negotiations; and, provided dialogue opportunities like this Fourth China Roundtable. I would also like to thank the Government of Kenya for the warm welcome; and, last but not least, the WTO Secretariat for organizing this high-level event.

It is an honour to share the podium this morning with Minister Addy, Dr. Zakhiwal, Madame Zhao, Mr Osakwe, Mr Kireyev and Mr Reiter. I hope that my intervention on "LDCs' Accessions, Achievements to Date" will contribute to the discussions and foster reflection on what we have

accomplished as well as the way forward. When I was preparing this presentation, I took stock of what we, the LDCs' Consultative Group and LDCs as individual Members and Acceding Governments, have achieved on accessions since 1995. The result is positive and thus satisfying, both from the standpoint of LDCs and from a systemic perspective. I hope also that you would share my views.

Let's start with the achievements on LDCs' Accessions over the past 20 years. If you allow me, I will take you to a trip down accessions memory lane:

- Since 1995, fifty-five Accession Working Parties have been established.
- Of these fifty-five, fifteen Working Parties have dealt with LDCs' Accessions.
- Of these fifteen, seven are already WTO Members: Cabo Verde, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Nepal, Samoa, Vanuatu and Yemen.
- Of these seven LDC Members, two, Cabo Verde and Samoa, have already graduated from LDC Status. Vanuatu is slated to graduate in 2018.

But, as you know, there is even more: At the 10<sup>th</sup> WTO Ministerial Conference, we will formally adopt the Accession Packages of yet another two LDCs: Afghanistan and Liberia. Hence, we can affirm today that nine out of fifteen LDCs have successfully concluded their accession negotiations.

Sixty per cent of acceding LDCs have concluded their accession to the WTO. A remarkable achievement, indeed, that we should be proud of. It shows that LDCs value WTO Membership and, together with other developing countries and economies in transition, are ready and willing to carry out the necessary work to become a Member. We need to reach out to share these successful stories. Events like this Fourth Round Table are an ideal platform for dialogue

and such sharing; the challenge is to keep the momentum and build on the achievements.

What have we learned since 1995? Over the past 20 years, we have learned that Accession to the WTO is a complex process. The LDCs Consultative Group has presented this view to Members, at every occasion since 2015. The LDCs Consultative Group also has recognized that the complexity derives from the fact that WTO Accession is a process based on domestic reforms to be undertaken by the acceding government. Only the acceding government can move the reforms forward so it is a sovereign exercise. WTO Accession can serve as an instrument to foster and consolidate reforms and the decision to reform rests with each government. As former WTO Director-General Lamy used to say "the acceding government is in the driver's seat of its own accession".

Experience has also shown us that WTO accession is a two-dimensional process: negotiations take place internally with domestic stakeholders; and, externally with WTO Members. We have also learned that there are no short-cuts for substantive negotiations. The better prepared the negotiating team is, the smoother the negotiation. Negotiations take the time Members and the acceding government need, there is no way around it. It is long-haul process but still feasible, as Minister Addy and Dr. Zakhival have just shared with us.

From a systemic perspective, LDCs achieved the political mandate to "facilitate and accelerate negotiations with acceding LDCs" contained in paragraph 42 of the Doha Ministerial Declaration. This catapulted LDCs' Accessions to the main stage and attracted the accession-specific attention of bilateral and multilateral donors.

Nowadays, trade is widely recognized as an instrument for economic growth and development. The Doha political mandate and the recognition of trade as an

effective instrument are reflected in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and in the work undertaken by the World Bank and Regional Banks. Moreover, the G20 is also working on trade and investment issues. This will certainly permeate our work in the WTO. Acceding governments, like Lao PDR, have made WTO Accession an integral part of their national strategies for growth and development and recognized that trade can be a driving positive force.

A collective achievement has been the negotiation of the Accession Guidelines. LDCs, developing and developed Members worked together to produce the "2002 LDCs' Accession Guidelines" and the "2012 General Council Decision to Strengthen, Streamline and Operationalize the 2002 Guidelines". These two instruments have provided clarity for Members and acceding LDCs and ensured the provision of much needed technical assistance and capacity building.

An important achievement shared by Members and the Secretariat is the tangible improvement in transparency. The Annual Report on Accessions by the WTO Director-General is the flagship source of information on the state of play of WTO accessions and other related activities; it is followed by the monthly meetings of the Informal Group on Accessions, where LDCs are duly represented individually and as a Group; the Accessions Newsletter that is disseminated throughout the WTO community; and, the Annual Outreach Dialogue with Regional Groups, where the Director of the Accessions Division meets with each group and provides detailed reports. The LDCs Consultative Group has always supported improvements in transparency, which has indeed helped delegations to better understand the business of accessions.

Accession is not an end in itself. Reaping benefits from WTO Membership requires substantive and sustained work. This is the reason why the LDCs' Consultative Group strongly supports the initiative of "Post-Accession Support"

by WTO Director-General Azevêdo. We trust that this initiative will be available to acceding LDCs to assist them in their first steps as WTO Members and to coordinate the assistance provided by other donors. The successful implementation of "Post-Accession Support" will be yet another achievement for the LDC community.

Looking ahead, I would like to encourage acceding LDCs to move their accession processes forward. Accessions are based on substance. The Working Parties can only work, if you submit negotiating inputs. If you need assistance, request it. It does not matter if you need pointed assistance to calculate domestic support or outreach support to convince your parliament to pass WTO-related legislation. Request the assistance. It is a demand-driven exercise and you, the acceding governments, know better than anyone what your needs are. Use the available technical assistance.

To conclude, let me point out that we have achieved:

- the political mandate in Doha;
- the guidelines; and,
- more importantly, nine fellow LDCs, including Afghanistan and Liberia, have successfully concluded their accession negotiations.

Accession to the WTO is achievable. It is a marathon and, therefore, you need to prepare for it, but it can be run.

The LDCs Consultative Group is ready to provide support to LDC acceding governments, which are ready to move forward. I also know that developing and developed Members are also ready to assist.

Let us build on the recent successes by Afghanistan and Liberia. Let us learn valuable lessons from their respective accessions; lessons that we can certainly apply to our own trade policies and trade negotiations.

Each LDC Accession to the WTO is a remarkable achievement. Let us rejoice and be ready to welcome Afghanistan and Liberia to the WTO.

Thank you very much.

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