



International
Trade
Centre

STATEMENT AT THE ACCESSION OF AFGHANISTAN TO THE WTO

17 DECEMBER 2015

NAIROBI

ARANCHA GONZALEZ

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
INTERNATIONAL TRADE CENTRE

H.E Eng. Mohammad Khan Rahmani, First Deputy Chief Executive

Excellencies

Trade is to Afghanistan what snow is to its Hindu Kush mountains: essential.

Afghanistan, a country at the heart of the most iconic trade roads– the silk route - joins today the family of the WTO Members. This is the end of a long journey which began in 2004.

I want to congratulate the First Deputy Chief Executive of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Mohammad Khan and the negotiating team for what I know has been a challenging task. But today is a day to celebrate these efforts and look at the future.

It gives me a special sense of satisfaction that the International Trade Center has been a partner of the government and business community in Afghanistan over the last four years.

ITC worked with stakeholders in Afghanistan to better understand the opportunities which WTO Membership offers. In several dedicated sessions we have seen how the private sector perspectives have been increasingly factored into Afghanistan's negotiating positions and how this has ensured coherence between the needs of the business community and Government's policy goals.

Our dedicated dialogue with the private and public sector stakeholders provided them with an opportunity to discuss Afghanistan's accession commitments and their business implications in an open and transparent manner. I am confident that this has helped in building greater stakeholder confidence in Afghanistan's quest for WTO membership.

But today marks the start of a new phase. Membership has been the primary aim up to this point. We must now ensure that WTO membership works for Afghanistan, its SMEs and women and men.

The Government of Afghanistan is already thinking ahead on how being a part of the WTO can be an important lever to increase the competitiveness of their SMEs. I can assure you, that the International Trade Center will continue to partner with Afghanistan to make this a reality.

The ITC is currently preparing a package of trade support for Afghanistan financed by the European Commission. WTO makes trade possible. We must now work to make trade happen. We will support the design and implementation of a National Export Strategy, assist in the implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement and support SMEs to manage cross-border procedures. This will all be done through a process of public-private dialogue to turn Afghan SMEs into engines of sustainable and inclusive growth.

Let me express appreciation for the work of the Chairperson Ambassador Roderick Van Schreven and the Secretariat accession team.

Afghanistan has had a most challenging recent past. But today it stands with the other 163 members of the WTO as an equal participant in global trade, commerce and rule making. It is an occasion to be celebrated.

Thank you