

**Remarks by the Minister of Foreign Trade of Costa Rica, Mr. Alexander Mora
Seminar organized by the Friends of e-commerce for Development
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Director General of the WTO, Mr. Roberto Azevedo
Secretary General of UNCTAD, Mr. Mukhisa Kituyi
Secretary General of the ITU, Mr. Houlin Zhao
Executive Director of ITC, Ms. Arancha González
His Excellency, Mr. Khurram Dastgir Khan, Federal Minister of Commerce of Pakistan

Dear friends,

It is my pleasure to be here to talk about a topic that is so close to my heart.

Before becoming a public officer, I devoted my life to be an entrepreneur. I founded my first company in digital technologies in the late 1980s when I was in my early 20s. I took advantage of the PC revolution, the massive and rapid transition from analog to digital and the very early days of the Internet. In the early 1990s -precisely in 1993-, I started to sell, remotely, the very first orthographic corrector for romance languages. That old is my affair with e-commerce. Of course, e-commerce as a concept didn't exist at those days. I still recall receiving a congratulation message from the Argentinian Ambassador in Katmandu, Nepal, probably my very first customer in that part of the world for my product. That message expressed to me the great value he received when using by the first time, an automated orthographic corrector for word processing in Spanish language and how, thanks to e-commerce, the Ambassador was able to get it. But this story took place in the very early years of digital technologies and e-commerce. To send the software to Katmandu I had to use the diplomatic bag: a floppy was delivered at the Argentinian Embassy in San Jose in Costa Rica; then it travelled physically to Buenos Aires in Argentina, and then it was sent to Katmandu, Nepal. I don't recall how many weeks or months the entire transaction took. But at the end, the Ambassador ended being my very first customer in that part of the world and one of the more than 50 million customers for my first truly global digital product sold from my country and probably from Latin America. Years later I was able to represent my country for over 5 years at the SCTD and thanks to that experience I was able to know a lot of the people that are here today.

At UNCTAD for example, I had the opportunity to represent my country at the CSTD on a regular basis for several years until 2014. The amplitude of the discussions that took place in that forum over the years on different topics like the Internet, the digital agenda, the Internet Governance Forum, allowed me to expand my understanding of the importance that digital trade had for a small country like Costa Rica. It was also very revealing to discover the

disconnect between the digital, development and the trade agendas, and as I gained experience over time, I came to understand e-commerce is perfect to glue to these three agendas together. I realized that e-commerce operated as **the zipper** that fastened both programmes together, interlocking them as one.

In our present reality I ask myself: **i)** Why is e-commerce important for developing countries? **ii)** How relevant are the discussions we are going to have here today, and **iii)** Can the Friends of e-Commerce for Development be the zipper to zip all these questions together and show opportunities and challenges to developing and least developed countries?

E-commerce is a very efficient market platform. It can satisfy the needs of consumers and producers using the least amount of resources possible making trade more sustainable. It democratizes opportunities by enabling consumers and producers to buy and sell what they want, to and from whoever they want, making trade more inclusive. It also gives them greater freedom of choice to make their transactions at lower costs, making trade much more competitive. Therefore, the governance of e-commerce must guarantee the protection of both, through transparent rules and norms, making trade more fair and equitable.

E-commerce is also a simpler and cheaper way for entrepreneurs to do business, locally and internationally. There is still ground to be explored and paradigms to be broken, to include the excluded and to bring the benefits of technology and trade to those who have not received them yet. That makes this enterprise so exciting and relevant to developing countries. In e-commerce, we are all *demandeurs*, regardless of our level of development.

Today, we are given the chance to link our commercial and development agendas like never before. We are given the chance to connect goods and services as a single product. We are given the chance to build a stronger bridge between UNCTAD and the WTO. We are given the chance to develop real and robust synergies between the developed world and the developing one. Silos must be broken. The digital world can be interlinked with the physical world and our discussions in this House can and must reflect that new reality. .

Everyone in this room understands the effects that brain drain causes to developing economies and how it hampers our own path towards development. Through e-commerce we hand opportunities to our own educated workforces to innovate and compete, fostering local talent. The so called “digital divide” is a manifestation of the social and economic rifts we have experienced for decades. Indeed, technology through e-commerce can contribute to close these gaps.

I believe that e-commerce can foster confidence and trust as it shows us What's In It for Us. Then we can get together to work on the rules and disciplines to govern the digital economy. Consumers and producers require the certainty to understand where they stand and maximize their participation in the global market economy, domestically and across borders, through e-commerce. Consumers will always be after better quality, greater comfort and lower prices. Producers will strive for less paperwork, lower transaction costs and greater facilitation to trade. Within this spectrum, Governments should aim to regulate where they have any jurisdiction. E-commerce needs global regulation. We are sitting under the right roof to have this conversation. This is the House where the rules that govern e-commerce must be made.

Dear friends, the world we are living in moves rapidly and waits for no one. The digital revolution and its ramifications, like e-commerce, are here to stay. I read somewhere that change was a synonym for hope: "...***I believe in tomorrow and I will be part of it***". I want to tell you that I DO BELIEVE in a better tomorrow, and I want to be part of that creation. By addressing the challenges of the future we can really be relevant and make a difference. This is not a conversation about how to fix 2016 but about how to co-create 2030 together. We have the moral authority to work for a more equitable, inclusive and sustainable generation distribution of opportunities for all.

Let us profit from all the wisdom and experience we are going to share during this day. Let it be the first of many gatherings to raise awareness about how e-commerce can become a vehicle for development. Let it be a conversation about building bridges for all developing and least developing members into the future. Let us not forget that e-commerce has been here for twenty years, that it is here to stay, and that we are yet to harvest the benefits that it represents for all of us. So let us work precisely on how we can benefit from it.

Thank you very much.