Respected Mr Chairman  
Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and gentlemen,  

In 1996 some of you and your predecessors joined together in Cartagena, Colombia, on the occasion of the First World Conference of Trade Promotion Organizations. Since then, the business world has changed dramatically and we have all tried to adjust.  

Two years ago in Marrakech, at the end of the Third World Conference of TPOs, participants were unanimous on the importance of getting together again in 2002 to brainstorm further how TPOs should respond to the tremendous challenge faced by their client exporters in this increasingly competitive world. Several expressed the desire to meet in Asia. China readily expressed a preliminary interest and later confirmed its offer to host the Conference. Indeed, our principal host, the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT) had the wonderful idea to invite us all to Beijing on the occasion of its 50th anniversary. The International Trade Centre UNCTAD/WTO (ITC) is honoured to have been closely associated with CCPIT in the preparation of the Fourth World Conference. We thank CCPIT warmly for hosting this Conference and congratulate it sincerely for its 50 years of hard and effective work for China. We wish CCPIT and its clients many more years of fruitful collaboration.  

The services provided by CCPIT and indeed by all of us, providers of trade support services to exporters of developing countries and economies in transition, are more needed now than ever before. As the theme of this conference says, TPOs and, I would add, their clients, are indeed navigating in a most turbulent new business environment. Globalization, trade liberalization and fierce competition the world over have drastically changed the environment in which business is conducted. Furthermore, trade is finally recognized as a prime tool for development and TPOs have a key role to play in ensuring that the benefits of the multilateral trading system reach out to developing and transition economies. A major task and a huge challenge.  

For TPOs to continue to be relevant, we must understand the new highly competitive business environment and be in a position to help our clients become more competitive. We must adapt our own way of doing business. Conferences such as this one provide unique opportunities to compare notes, to exchange ideas, to share best practices and, in this particular case, to have the pleasure of doing it in the country which has won the honour to host the 2008 Olympics.  

I congratulate the CCPIT for its most pertinent selection of subjects to be discussed and for the large turnout from all parts of the world. I invite all, in my capacity as co-host, to participate intensely in the Conference. Let’s make sure we do not miss one single opportunity to share our good ideas and to learn about better ones. I can think of no better way to honour CCPIT, on the occasion of its 50th anniversary, than to participate actively in the great Conference it has organized for us.  

I wish all TPOs present the best of luck in facing the challenges ahead. We do have what it takes to succeed. Let’s act together and proceed with enthusiasm.  

Thank you.