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AFRICAN GROUP AND ITC UNITE TO STRENGTHEN AFRICA'S ABILITY TO EXPORT

Representatives of the African Group and the International Trade Centre (ITC) have underlined their determination to work together to bolster Africa's capacity to export and confront the global economic crisis.

Thanking the ITC for its efforts on behalf of African exporters, particularly small and medium-sized businesses, the African Group permanent representative in Geneva, Khadija R. Masri, pledged increasing cooperation between the two organizations.

"Our delegation in Geneva is fully committed to working with you to facilitate your involvement with our continent," she told ITC Executive Director Patricia R. Francis at a meeting to analyze the ongoing partnership on June 19.

ITC, a joint venture of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the United Nations, provides 'Aid for Trade' assistance to developing countries, with a particular emphasis on creating awareness within the private sector of market opportunities and on working with local associations and trade bodies to foster export potential.

Some 43% of ITC resources go to helping least developed countries (LDCs), with Africa accounting for 36%, by far the highest share of any region. ITC signed a memorandum of understanding with the African Union in 2007 to work jointly to improve the capacity of African businesses to compete in international markets.

"The ITC is seeking to strengthen its partnership with the African Union," said Ms Francis. "The current global crisis is hurting trade and investment but it also offers opportunities that ITC is ready to work alongside the African Union to optimise through increased emphasis on markets and private business," she said.

With its credo of "Export Impact for Good," ITC is working to strengthen Africa's ability to achieve the core Millennium Development Goals (MDG), including eradicating extreme poverty and promoting gender equality.

On access to markets, Ms Francis highlighted ITC's assistance to Ethiopia, Madagascar, Tanzania and Uganda to improve product quality and standards of spices with the assistance of the American Spices Trade Association.

Ms Francis noted that ITC had forged productive alliances with leading African economic groupings, including COMESA, ECCAS, ECOWAS and SADC. With the latter, it is working to develop the skills of small farmers to help them form part of supermarket supply chains and also get access to export markets.

ITC has also recently signed a new four-year partnership accord with the Dutch Centre for the Promotion of Imports from developing countries (CBI), which will enable it to provide additional trade assistance to a large number of African countries.

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