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NEW INITIATIVE TO SUPPORT POOREST COUNTRIES IN JOINING WTO – FOSTERING PUBLIC-PRIVATE SECTOR DIALOGUE

A new initiative launched today will support several of the world's poorest countries in preparing to join the World Trade Organization (WTO) and will focus in particular on strengthening relations between governments and the private sector.

WTO and the International Trade Centre (ITC) launched the Trade Capacity for Acceding LDCs Programme as the WTO's seventh Ministerial Conference opened in Geneva.

ITC Executive Director Patricia R. Francis said: "In our globalized world, the poorest countries have much to gain from WTO membership, since increased trade can make a major contribution to poverty reduction. But there are considerable challenges, and this programme will help countries to take steps to overcome them."

There are currently 12 LDCs (least developed countries) in the process of negotiating accession to the WTO and the programme will initially be launched in five of them: Ethiopia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Liberia, Samoa and Yemen. WTO and ITC have received an increasing number of requests for support in the complex accession process.

The underlying philosophy of the programme is that by improving the understanding of all parties of the business implications of WTO membership - including the opportunities that it may present, the benefits it can bring and the challenges that must be overcome the necessary conditions can be established for developing a vibrant export-oriented business environment.

In implementing the programme, ITC will focus on building up the capacity of the private sector to understand the opportunities and benefits of WTO membership, through seminars, workshops, business guides, analysis of trade trends and tariffs, and dissemination of case studies illustrating best practice.

The WTO will set up reference centres to enable both private-sector operators and government officials to access trade data and WTO-related documentation. It will also organize seminars and technical workshops for accession negotiating teams.



Ms. Francis said: “As well as embarking on a wide-ranging domestic reform to increase competitiveness and diversify the economy, governments need to seek the broadest possible consensus among stakeholders on the benefits of WTO membership, and in particular secure the whole-hearted support of the private sector”.

“The best way to do this is through openness and transparency during the negotiations, and by continual dialogue between government and the private sector to increase mutual understanding. That is what we will be encouraging. Entrepreneurs need to be sure that trade negotiators understand and robustly defend their interests and priorities.”

ITC is a joint agency of the United Nations and the WTO, focusing in particular on developing the export capabilities of small and medium-sized businesses in developing and transition countries.

For more information on ITC activities at the WTO Ministerial Conference, please visit <http://www.intracen.org/aidfortrade/>

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