

Opening remarks by the Chair of the 56th session

By H.E. Ms. Usha Chandnee Dwarka-Canabady, Ambassador, Permanent Representative to the WTO, Permanent Mission of the Republic of Mauritius to the United Nations Office at Geneva

Madam Chair,
Executive Director Pamela Coke-Hamilton
Director-General, Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala
Secretary-General, Rebeca Grynspan
Excellencies,
Distinguished participants,

On behalf of Mauritius and as the outgoing Chair, I welcome all of you to the 57th session of the Joint Advisory Group, whether you are joining us physically here at the World Trade Organization or remotely.

Through today's proceedings, I am looking forward to hearing about the achievements of the ITC in meeting the needs of small businesses in developing countries. This past year, it has been a pleasure to witness how ITC tackled obstacles, pushing boundaries, and prioritizing the interests of small businesses.

ITC's Annual Report 2022 is a demonstration of these significant achievements. Let me also highlight the ITC's flagship report, the SME Competitiveness Outlook and the Fast Track Tech Program. I extend my congratulations to the ITC staff, whose dedication and hard work have been instrumental in producing such results and milestones highlighted in the report. ITC's commitment to aid for trade and its unique offerings and services have played a pivotal role in bolstering the resilience of thousands of businesses, fostering a more conducive environment for business and policy while equipping businesses and policymakers with invaluable data and intelligence.

The Report highlights how ITC is aligned with the needs of the present time, addressing crucial aspects such as inclusivity, supply chain resilience, climate-friendly trade, digital trade, and regional integration. Operating in 134 countries, ITC consistently delivers tangible outcomes, effectively addressing the prevailing trends and issues of our era. Let me

highlight three examples where ITC continues to play a key role in addressing the pressing issues of our time.

First, ITC has been playing a crucial role in operationalizing the Africa Continental Free Trade Area. Through the umbrella programme *One Trade Africa*, ITC has sensitized the private sector in over 40 countries on the benefits of the AfCFTA with a focus on supporting Business Support Organizations and promoting diversification. In 2022, ITC also signed an MOU with the AfCFTA secretariat which has enabled the co-delivery of continental public goods. I seize this opportunity to turn towards the Office of Africa within ITC and wish the former Chief of Africa well in his new endeavours and to welcome the new Chief of Africa whose energy will no doubt serve us well.

Second, ITC addresses the empowerment of vulnerable groups, with over 5,000 women producers and entrepreneurs in 28 countries benefiting from in-country projects. Mauritius is proud to now host a SheTrades Hub, facilitating the internationalization, digitalization, and institutional strengthening of women-led businesses, positioning the country for success in the digital economy. I also thank the Executive Director, Pamela Coke Hamilton for taking time to travel to Mauritius where she had a significant impact.

Third, ITC focuses on those furthest behind. In 2022, over 73% of interventions were targeted towards least developed countries, landlocked developing countries, small island developing states, sub-Saharan African countries, small, vulnerable economies and conflict-affected countries. Coming from a small island developing state myself, I understand the significance of amplifying the voices of underrepresented stakeholders in the development landscape. I thank ITC for consistently prioritizing the voices of the lesser heard. And I encourage all delegates and partner organizations to continue, and where possible, expand their collaboration with ITC for what we see with ITC are real, tangible outcomes that make a difference.

Now as I hand over my role as Chair of the JAG to Her Excellency Ms. Nadia Theodore, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Canada to the World Trade Organization in Geneva, I would like to thank you,

Executive Director and the JAG Secretariat for their support, as it has been an absolute pleasure to be the JAG Chair of the 56th session.

Thank you.