

Statement
Delivered by Mr. Behzad Azarsa
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to the United Nations Office in Geneva
Before the
54th SESSION OF THE ITC JOINT ADVISORY GROUP MEETING
25 November 2020-Geneva
Virtual Meeting

In the name of God the most compassionate the most merciful

Thank you Madam Chair,

**H.E. Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Botswana,
Hon. Secretary General of UNCTAD,
Hon. Deputy Director General of the World Trade Organisation,
Hon. Executive Director of the International Trade Centre,
Distinguished delegates,**

At the outset, allow me to thank and appreciate Ambassador of Finland, as the outgoing chair and to welcome and congratulate you Madam Ambassador Molokomme, for chairing the 54th Session of the JAG meeting.

I would also like to congratulate sincerely Ms. Pamela Coke-Hamilton, as the new Executive Director of ITC and wishing her success. Rest assured of my delegation's full support and coordination.

Madam Chair,

Today's JAG meeting in November 2020 is taking place at a very crucial juncture which is not comparable to its previous one, on July 2019.

Covid19 pandemic, exposed the world to a far-reaching social disruption of our generation. The attempts to manage the impact of the pandemic on health have resulted in significant economic decline.

The world is already suffering from chronic and unresolved challenges of inequality within and across countries, global warming, trade war, paralyzed system of world trade, and on top unilateral approaches and policies which is threatening all the achievements of our collective efforts and multilateral wisdom.

Madam Chair,

My delegation would like to appreciate ITC, its leadership and entire team for organizing JAG meeting and for providing us with insightful documents such as the Annual Report 2019 and the Strategic Plan 2018–2021, Trade Routes to Sustainable and Inclusive Development.

As reflected in the report, ITC's role in developing South-South linkages, supporting regional economic integration, strengthening trade and investment support institutions, connecting to international value chains amongst others have been praiseworthy and significant.

As engine of economic growth and social development, MSMEs provide a huge share of global employment. However they face a number of challenges especially in developing world due to their limited resources, less knowledge of how to enter into new markets, and lack of online connectivity, particularly at the current situation of lockdowns as a result of the pandemic.

With the aim of bridging the development divide and digital gap, MSMEs need to become more outward looking and more international both in physical and digital forms. ITC could contribute constructively to this end due to its leading role and expertise.

Lastly, it is highly recommended that UNCTAD, WTO and ITC continue to put developing countries in their priority in a coherent and collaborative manner. It is also urgent and important to strengthen their efforts to work hand in hand with the aim of promoting trade and development especially at this juncture that the whole world is facing unprecedented challenges of covid19 pandemic.

In this line, the public health has become an integral and urgent part of every trade and development strategies, more than ever before. Therefore it opens a new window of responsibility for UNCTAD, WTO and ITC to play their constructive role by ensuring the equal access of all developing countries to the efficient medications and vaccines.

As regards to the platform used for this important virtual meeting, my delegation along with other delegations believe that organizers should ensure these events are accessible with no limitations by all member states. All delegations in and outside Geneva including in capital of developing countries should be able to connect to the meeting and participate effectively in the deliberations.

In conclusion, **Madam Chair**, Iran attaches great importance to its relations with ITC. Thanks to EU funding, EU-Iran Trade Development Project to produce, Iran National Export Strategy (NES) is well on track. Moreover, I would like to announce holding the EU-IRAN Business Forum, with the close cooperation of the ITC, due to be held in mid-December 2020.

Thank you Madam Chairperson.