

**52<sup>nd</sup> SESSION OF THE ITC JOINT ADVISORY GROUP (JAG)**  
**10 JULY 2018, ROOM S1 (10:00 a.m.)**  
**SPEAKING NOTES FOR DDG AGAH AT THE OPENING SESSION**

*[Note regarding the opening session: The 52<sup>nd</sup> Session of the JAG will be opened by Ambassador Frances Lisson of Australia, the Chair of the last JAG meeting (the 51<sup>st</sup> Session, held in 2017). A statement will then be made by Ambassador Alvaro Cedeno Molinari of Costa Rica, the Chair of the 52<sup>nd</sup> Session. The floor will subsequently be given to the WTO for an opening statement, and then to UNCTAD. Finally, the Executive Director of the ITC will make her intervention.]*

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I warmly congratulate and welcome you to this very important role.

And let me also thank Ambassador Lisson for her hard work and leadership over the past year.

Secretary-General Kituyi,  
Executive Director Gonzalez,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning.

It is always a pleasure to host the ITC Joint Advisory Group here at the WTO.

The Joint Advisory Group meeting is an important date in the annual calendar for the trade community, as the meeting provides an opportunity to look back on the activities of the ITC over the past year, and also to look forward and discuss what the ITC should continue to do within its mandate to help make trade work as a tool for prosperity and development.

In 2017, the ITC continued to deliver strongly on its projects across the focus areas of its work.

In Guinea, it facilitated the country's first shipment of air-freighted mangoes.

In Nepal, it supported the cashmere industry to develop products, find buyers and improve business development skills.

It also assisted fruit and vegetable growers in Lesotho and Tanzania to raise their incomes through increased productivity and value addition.

And through the SheTrades initiative, it continued to connect women entrepreneurs to markets.

Overall, an additional 15,200 enterprises were supported to improve their international competitiveness, or to meet buyers with whom they subsequently transacted business.

These concrete activities highlight, once again, the relevance of the ITC for small businesses in developing countries, as well as the complementarity of the work of the two parent institutions.

From the WTO side, the priority is of course to maintain a strong, rules-based multilateral trading system. One of our main tasks, in that respect, is to ensure that trade, and the multilateral trading system, work to the benefit of developing countries and LDCs. The ITC plays a strong supporting role, since it provides the much-needed input on the ground that allows the benefits of trade to flow to the small businesses, which are the lifeline of so many of the citizens of developing countries.

The collaboration between the ITC and its parent institutions spans a wide range of areas. In recent times, we have collaborated in launching a new online trade information portal on cotton – known as the Cotton Portal – designed for exporters, importers, investors and trade support institutions to search business opportunities and market requirements for cotton products. We also continue our constructive partnership on ePing – an alert system to increase transparency and dialogue on SPS and TBT notifications – and work together on various matters relating to trade facilitation. To give another example, the ITC has a longstanding partnership with the STDF – the Standards and Trade Development Facility. The STDF is a valuable platform for building synergies among implementing and technical agencies in the SPS area.

And all of this collaboration is done with the aim of helping developing countries and LDCs to benefit from trade, within the context of the multilateral trading system.

In this regard, the importance of a strong multilateral trading system, which implies continued multilateral cooperation, cannot be overemphasized. Without this cooperation, WTO Ministers would not have been able to deliver on the Trade Facilitation Agreement, on the elimination of agricultural export subsidies, or other key other outcomes harvested at the WTO Ministerial Conferences held in Bali and Nairobi.

The most recent WTO Ministerial Conference, held in Buenos Aires in December 2017, was also an important one for the multilateral trading system.

These are times when trade tensions, underpinned by a rise of trade protectionist measures, might call into question the relevance of the rules-based system that WTO Members have come to trust.

Although we may not have had all the results we had hoped for coming out of Buenos Aires, Ministers, nevertheless, adopted a number of multilateral Decisions which highlight the importance that Members attach to the WTO system. Among these is the Decision to, *inter alia*, continue to engage constructively in the fisheries subsidies negotiations, with a view to adopting by the next Ministerial Conference, an agreement on comprehensive and effective disciplines that prohibit certain forms of fisheries subsidies that contribute to overcapacity and overfishing.

This is, of course, an important Decision in the overall framework for the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals, to which the WTO is committed.

The attainment of the SDGs is, I know, also of importance to the ITC, which continues to work towards this end within its mandate. Given that international trade is essentially an activity undertaken by the private sector, it is obviously of importance to work closely with private enterprises in this regard, which is precisely what the ITC does.

At the WTO, we also recognize the importance of maintaining that close contact with the private sector. Accordingly, in June, we hosted the second Trade Dialogues event with the business community, at the request of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) and the B20, the business arm of the G20.

During that event, business representatives discussed many issues, including sustainable development; e-commerce; investment facilitation; and issues relating to small enterprises. One important message coming out of the meeting was the strong support by the business community for the WTO and the rules-based multilateral trading system. Businesses clearly see the value of the system – and the need to keep working to strengthen it.

As we look forward, I think it is also important to recognize the structural changes that are taking place in the global economy. Technology is the force that is driving economic change today, and governments must think of new ways to support and train their workers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. International institutions that underpin multilateralism and the global economy, including the WTO, will also have to evolve.

In that respect, some conversations have started among groups of WTO Members in a number of areas, including e-commerce; measures to help smaller businesses to trade; investment facilitation; and how trade connects to the economic empowerment of women.

The ITC has a particular role in working with small enterprises, so let me say a few words about the informal working group on micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) that was set up by several WTO Members at the Buenos Aires Ministerial Conference.

Essentially, this informal group was established to discuss various issues of relevance to MSMEs, with the purpose of allowing them to better participate in international trade. What is, particularly noteworthy, is that the Members that established the informal working group indicated in their statement that they will strive for a multilateral outcome at the next Ministerial Conference.

I believe that outcomes at the multilateral level are the most desirable, whichever area we are talking about, and I therefore applaud the ambition of the concerned Members. A multilateral outcome on MSMEs will clearly be something of great interest to the ITC, so this is an initiative that should be kept track of in this context.

In closing, let me come back to a central premise which will drive much of the work of international institutions in the coming years, which is the attainment of the SDGs. It is well recognized that trade has a critical role to play in this regard, and there are many facets to this.

A recent publication by the WTO Secretariat, titled "Mainstreaming trade to attain the Sustainable Development Goals", lays out the different ways in which trade, and the WTO, contribute to the attainment of the SDGs.

The publication shows that, by delivering and implementing trade reforms, which are pro-growth and pro-development, and by continuing to foster stable and fair trading relations across the world, the WTO is playing an important role in delivering the SDGs, just as it did with the Millennium Development Goals before them. The publication also examines the SDGs from economic, social and environmental perspectives; and outlines how trade is contributing to

making progress in each of these areas. It recommends a number of steps to help accelerate progress in achieving the SDGs.

Within this framework, I think it is clear that the strong collaboration between the ITC and its parent institutions must continue, to ensure that trade genuinely contributes to improving people's life.

I wish you all a very productive and lively meeting.

Thank you for your attention.