

Opening remarks by the Chair of the 54th session

Statement by the Chair of the 54th Session: H.E. Dr. Athaliah Lesiba Molokomme, Ambassador, Permanent Mission of Republic of Botswana to the United Nations Office and other International Organizations at Geneva

Your Excellency Ambassador Bekkers PR of the Netherlands and incoming chair of the JAG,
ITC Executive Director Pamela Coke-Hamilton
UNCTAD Deputy Secretary-General, Ms. Isabelle Durant
UNCTAD Deputy Director-General, Mr. Xiangchen Zhang
Excellencies, Distinguished Members,

On behalf of Botswana and as the outgoing Chair of the Joint Advisory Group, I welcome all of you to the 55th session of the Joint Advisory Group and its first ever hybrid session. Whether you are joining us remotely or here in the Palais des Nations, we are pleased that you can join us for this 54th session.

As we continue to grapple with the prolonged challenges of the COVID 19 pandemic, small businesses were severely affected, especially in developing countries. Many small businesses struggled with a limited financial cushion and lacked institutional support and fiscal incentives, leaving them among the most vulnerable in our global economy.

Consequently as we look for pathways to rebuild, the economic recovery should necessarily place small businesses at the forefront of the effort. They are the engines of employment and generate most jobs for youth, women, and vulnerable communities. They play an integral role in holding our societies together. At this critical juncture, it is important that we direct our focus to small businesses and do all within our power to enable them to be a catalyst for growth and development.

In my country Botswana, ITC provided much needed support to mainstream trade and SME development into national development

planning. This helped Botswana diversify its export-base and set our country on a path towards middle-income status.

Strengthening SMEs is even more important at this time than ever before. With ITC's support, we can put small businesses on the recovery agenda of national policy-makers and equip them with the tools to support their development.

We thank the ITC for the two documents provided today. We appreciate the Annual Report, as it demonstrates how ITC pivoted and kept its delivery high despite the very challenging conditions confronting us all. Its quick response and flexible approach in adapting its delivery mechanisms demonstrated the ITC's efforts to ensure that it is fit for purpose.

We also appreciate the Strategic Plan put forth by Executive-Director Pamela Coke-Hamilton that sets your vision for ITC during the upcoming years.

Before I hand over my role as the Chair of the JAG to His Excellency Mr. Paul Bekkers, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Netherlands to the UN in Geneva, I want to encourage all members and partner organizations to continue their collaboration with the ITC.

The ITC's mission to integrate small businesses of developing countries into the global economy can support resilience building efforts and accelerate economic recovery.

I wish you a successful 55th session of the Joint Advisory Group and thank you for your attention.