

ITC JOINT ADVISORY GROUP (JAG) MEETING

10 JULY 2017, ROOM S1 (10:00-13:00)

DG SPEAKING NOTES¹

[INTRODUCTION]

Thank you Madam Chair, Ambassador Lisson (Australia) – welcome to the role.

And thank you Ambassador Batora (Ethiopia) for your hard work and leadership over the last year.

Minister Touray,
Commissioner Muchanga,
Secretary-General Kituyi,
Executive Director Gonzalez,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning – and welcome to the WTO. It is always a pleasure to host the ITC Joint Advisory Group.

¹ Initial draft prepared by Development Division.

Of course the International Trade Centre is jointly funded by the WTO and UNCTAD. So this meeting provides an important opportunity to look at the work of the ITC over the past year and to set the course for the future.

But, I think this occasion is also significant for another important reason. The ITC is a delivery body, and so each year, this meeting serves as a moment to focus on the difference that trade makes to people's lives.

This year ITC projects have helped Tunisian textile companies to increase their export earnings and create new job opportunities for young people.

They have supported cocoa-producing SMEs in Peru to improve their production processes.

And they have helped villages in Myanmar to build up their tourism potential.

Each of these projects is making a big difference in their communities. And, taken together, they are a constant and welcome reminder of the power of trade to drive growth, development and job creation.

They remind us that, at the end of the day, our efforts here to make the multilateral trading system work better do have a real impact in people's lives. And they underscore the centrality of our capacity-building work in ensuring that everyone can benefit from trade. Of course, this is particularly timely given that we are hosting the Aid for Trade Global Review here this week.

So, looking ahead, we have to maintain and strengthen all of this work.

The ITC's essential mission is to help smaller companies from developing countries to join trade flows. Progress in this direction means progress towards achieving the more inclusive trading system that we all want to see. And it represents a major contribution to achieving the new Sustainable Development Goals.

With this in mind I think there are a number of areas where we can work together to achieve even more in the years to come.

[INFORMATION SHARING]

For example, WTO research shows that the fixed costs involved with trade can be particularly difficult for SMEs. This includes dealing with standards, costly border procedures, and other non-tariff barriers.

We are already working to tackle these issues in a variety of ways.

One example is the ePing alert system that the WTO launched last year, together with UNDESA and the ITC.

The idea is to alert members about new TBT and SPS measures at an early stage, and to facilitate dialogue amongst the public and private sector in addressing potential trade problems before they occur.

It is a fairly simple innovation, but it has been a big success.

Between all of our organizations we have a wealth of information and expertise on regulations and standards in markets around the world.

Perhaps we could look at how to make the data we already have even more readily available – and thereby tackle the information gaps that stop many SMEs from trading.

Arancha and I have been discussing this in some detail – and I know that she has been presenting some thoughts to members.

I look forward to seeing what more we can do.

[TFA IMPLEMENTATION]

Another front where we can build on our existing partnership is to help WTO members in implementing the Trade Facilitation Agreement, which came into force just a few months ago. I know that you all are familiar with the benefits of this Agreement, and the work that we are doing to help developing and least developed countries with their implementation.

The ITC is playing an important role here, with a specific focus on ensuring that reforms to border measures and customs procedures respond to the needs of the private sector, and especially SMEs.

We have to continue strengthening these activities to ensure that SMEs can fully benefit from this breakthrough Agreement. Working together with a range of other partners will be essential here.

And this brings me to the final area where I think we can develop our work together.

[AID FOR TRADE]

We must do more to explore innovative partnerships between our capacity-building programs.

More than 300 billion dollars have been disbursed through the WTO's Aid for Trade initiative since it was launched just over a decade ago. This work puts an increasing focus on SME internationalization. Aid for Trade support for SME development rose by around 50% between 2005 and 2013.

We also work on other fronts to ensure that the smaller players get the support they need to start trading – for example through the EIF and the STDF.

These projects reinforce one another. But I think we can do more to ensure that they work in a coordinated and complementary way.

Of course the Aid for Trade week is the perfect moment to share ideas and explore these possibilities.

[WTO FUTURE WORK]

Many of the elements I've talked about this morning are increasingly prominent in our discussions at the WTO.

Members are considering how we can advance in a wide range of areas. There is intense work on the Doha issues at the various negotiating groups.

There are also open-ended conversations going on about SMEs, e-commerce, investment facilitation as well as other areas.

These discussions are evolving. Just a few weeks ago, Mukhisa, Arancha, and I attended an event hosted by a group of members focused on SMEs. And we heard a lot of interesting and very practical ideas.

I welcome the energy this has injected into our work.

It prompts us to consider how we are serving the users – and potential users – of the trading system, and how we might serve them even better.

[CONCLUSION]

With huge development challenges before us – and aiming at delivering on the SDGs – I think we should always be challenging ourselves to do more, and to do it better.

The WTO and UNCTAD will continue to support the ITC's projects in this direction – and we will continue working together.

I said at the outset that this meeting is a chance to look at the positive difference that trade can make in people's lives. This is what we're all working to achieve – and this is what should always be at the forefront of our minds.

All the areas I've outlined today, and maybe some others, will help us to continue making a difference in a very practical way.

So let's keep working together to see what more we can do.

Thank you all. I wish you all a very successful event – and another successful year ahead.

Words: 1,100