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**STATEMENT BY THE AMBASSADOR OF TURKMENISTAN AT THE JOINT
ADVISORY GROUP MEETING**

Geneva, 2 November 2021

Thank you, Mr. Chair,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to ITC for all the work it has been doing in Turkmenistan to foster the development of our international trade. ITC has been Turkmenistan's partner for many years and we are glad that our cooperation intensified with the regional project Ready4Trade Central Asia, which started in January 2020.

I would like to express my gratitude to the donor – the European Union – for making this project possible.

The project has two focus areas: trade facilitation and E-commerce, which are both extremely important for Turkmenistan and are aligned with the country's strategic priorities. At the policy level, the project supports the Government in developing a National Trade Facilitation Portal. At the SME level, it helps Turkmen companies to develop their digital presence, to enhance their understanding of cross-border requirements and to improve compliance with trade formalities. The project also supports women's economic empowerment through its gender component. Despite the short time the project has been implemented, we were already able to achieve good progress.

2021 has been an important year for Turkmenistan as it has adopted key national strategies that support trade and development. In February 2021, the Government adopted the new Foreign Trade Strategy 2021-2030 and we are grateful for ITC's contribution to its preparation. It is worth mentioning that the cooperation with ITC and the WTO is part of this Strategy.

Moreover, this October, the Ready4Trade project has already conducted some initial trainings on WTO accession and trade negotiations, as well as on commercial diplomacy and ITC market analysis tools. This training was very useful for our colleagues from the Government and trade-related organizations.

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Currently, Turkmenistan is exploring the possibility of becoming a member of the WTO, after it obtained observer status back in July 2020. Turkmenistan indicated its willingness to initiate negotiations for WTO accession within a period of five years. This is an important step for our country, and we highly appreciate that ITC stands ready to help us in this process, including ITC's support in the work of the Intergovernmental Commission that was created to work on the issues of accession. Turkmenistan's observer status strengthens the country's position in international trade and represents a first important step in providing guarantees and transparency, which should attract foreign investments.

According to various international studies, developing countries can benefit from the implementation of effective trade procedures. The WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (entered into force on 22/02/2017) also contains transit provisions that are important to many developing countries, including landlocked and transit developing countries. Trade facilitation reforms are also important for these countries in the context of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goals 16 and 17.

I sincerely hope that our cooperation with ITC will be fruitful and long-lasting and will benefit Turkmen SMEs and Turkmen economy overall.

Thank you for your attention.