

WTO DDG Xiangchen Zhang

55th session of the Joint Advisory Group (JAG) of the International Trade Centre (ITC) 2nd November 2021 Room XIX, Palais des Nations

1. Introduction

- Your excellency Athaliah Lesiba Molokomme, Ambassador of the Republic of Botswana [Chair of the 54th Session of the Joint Advisory Group];
- Your excellency Paul Bekkers, Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands [Chair of the 55th Session of the JAG]
- Executive Director Pamela Coke-Hamilton of the International Trade Centre;
- Secretary-General Rebeca Grynspan of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development;
- Your excellencies, ladies and gentlemen.
- Good morning.
- It is my privilege to be with you today at this meeting of ITC's Joint Advisory Group. I am honoured to be representing Director-General Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala who sends her regrets that she cannot here. She is in Glasgow for COP26.
- The UN climate change conference kicks off a busy November. Bookending the month, we have the WTO's 12th Ministerial Conference from 30 November to 3 December.
- Like everyone present, I sincerely hope that these events will deliver substantive outcomes for the planet and for inclusive prosperity. Concrete deliverables that curtail climate change and promote green growth. Outcomes that support COVID-19 response and that buttress the global recovery.

- Outcomes that give the WTO renewed energy and direction. And that add further vibrancy to our cooperation with ITC.
- There is much to build on in terms of ITC-WTO collaboration.
- Last week, I was in Tashkent. There I heard from government officials and the private sector about the policy advice that ITC is providing on WTO accession. Uzbekistan is one of several observer governments to which ITC is providing policy advice.
- I feel sure that I will receive similarly positive feedback about ITC's policy advisory work from other countries during my tenure as WTO Deputy Director-General responsible for development, technical cooperation and accession issues.

2. Facilitating trade in times of crisis

- ITC's accession policy advice is part of an impressive array of services that have been much in demand during the pandemic. [Like others] I commend ITC for breaking through the 1 million mark for the number of registered users of its trade and market intelligence tools.
- With global trade contracting sharply and then rallying strongly, the private sector has needed a trusted partner to turn to get information. Supply chains were, and indeed remain, stretched in many essential products. Perhaps the most essential of these is of course COVID-19 vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics.
- This is one area where I believe that the WTO's 12th Ministerial Conference can achieve meaningful results. Unequal access to COVID-19 vaccines is holding back economic recovery in many parts of the developing world, in particular among the lowest income countries. Recovery in an essential segment of the global services economy – that is, travel and tourism services – is critical for many least developed and small economies.

3. Working together to help MSME grasp new market realities

- ITC responded quickly to the pandemic in 2020 to conduct a COVID-19 Business Impact Survey. Among the first of its kind, it highlighted the scale of the challenge that the pandemic was posing – and continues to pose – for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises.
- A key element of ITC's mission is to help smaller companies from developing countries to connect to regional and global value chains, and thus convert the opportunities offered by the trading system into inclusive growth. COVID-19 makes this even harder.
- One way that we have worked together to support MSMEs rise to the challenge is to bridge the information gap that they face. The Global Trade Helpdesk, the ePing alert system, rules of origin facilitator and cotton portal are all examples of where we have worked together to close information gaps at a time when relevant, timely market information was especially hard for MSMEs to access.
- At the WTO, Members are considering MSME-related issues through various policy dialogues. ITC has been a regular contributor, imparting knowledge and expertise to the discussions. As many of you know, last week the informal working group on MSMEs published a Final Draft Declaration ahead of MC12.
- This Declaration provides a springboard for further action, whether in the context of our joint work on trade intelligence, or within ITC's own programmes such as the SME Academy, Value Added to Trade Programme, ecomConnect programme or E-commerce Entrepreneur Knowledge Series.
- Pivoting to new working methods during the pandemic is a message that emerges strongly in ITC's annual report. It is a publication that demonstrates the value that ITC brings across the full range of its activities. These activities have served small businesses particularly well in the pivot to the business realities of the pandemic.
- A critical component of this pivot has been towards the digital economy. And as the Executive Director, Pamela Coke-Hamilton, has made clear, this is an

increasingly critical part of ITC's plans moving ahead. As it should be also for WTO.

- Members will examine the state of the e-commerce work programme at MC12. The co-conveners of the small group negotiations on e-commerce want to leverage the Ministerial to showcase progress they have made, including in such technical areas as paperless trading, electronic transactions and invoicing. All have become part of day-to-day operations for many more businesses during the pandemic. And all are areas in which ITC can help MSMEs overcome digital divides and achieve positive trade outcomes.
- Another area that I would like to reference is ITC's work with WTO Members on investment facilitation for development. ITC's knowledge products are helping Members at all levels of development work their way towards an outcome. Facilitating investment is in everyone's best interest as we seek to foster an inclusive recovery.

4. Empowering women for inclusive, green trade

- A further area where ITC is making a difference is women's economic empowerment. ITC's flagship She Trades initiative has successfully and tangibly impacted women on the ground, making trade more relevant than ever for them.
- ITC has been building women entrepreneurs' competitiveness and enabling trade. It drives impact for women entrepreneurs in 30 countries, providing capacity building, networking, market connections and access to finance for women entrepreneurs that are export-ready or near export-ready. Overall, ITC has generated over \$250m in trade and investment for women entrepreneurs since 2015.
- The WTO and ITC are collaborating on the creation of a fund focussing trade and gender. This fund will be hosted in ITC and it will promote new trade and investment opportunities for women entrepreneurs. The fund will enabling them to scale up their businesses as well as support policy change, directly contributing to inclusive and sustainable development.

- Our continued collaboration also extends to the work of the Informal Working Group on Trade and Gender established in the WTO last September where ITC is making substantial contributions and to the recently relaunched International Gender Champions Trade Impact Group.

5. CONCLUSION

- Let me now come back to my point of departure: the UN climate change conference.
- ITC is helping make the business case for MSMEs to 'go green' through programmes such as the GreenToCompete Strategy and Hubs, the Trade for Sustainable Development (T4SD) programme and work on value chains.
- The future of trade can and must be green, and I would like MC12 to make advances in this direction.
- Unfortunately, time does not allow me to touch on many other issues that the ITC Executive Director outlined. And I can make only the briefest reference to other domains in which we are cooperating, including the Standards and Trade Development Facility, the Enhanced Integrated Framework, LDC graduation, cotton, and the Trade for Peace Programme.
- I would like to salute Pamela for the leadership that she has shown to help ITC pivot through such challenging times. You enjoy our full confidence to take forward ITC's new Strategic Plan for the period 2022-2025.
- In closing, let me reiterate my hope that this busy month will deliver substantive outcomes for people and the planet in Glasgow and Geneva. The WTO looks forward to continued work with ITC to deliver trade impact for good.
- I thank you for your attention.