

## **Opening remarks by the Chair of the 55<sup>th</sup> session**

*Statement by the Chair of the 55th Session: H.E. Mr. Paul Bekkers, Ambassador, Permanent Representative to the WTO, Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the United Nations Office and other International Organizations in Geneva*

Executive Director Pamela Coke-Hamilton  
Deputy Director-General, Mr. Xiangchen Zhang  
Secretary-General, Rebeca Grynspan  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished participants,

On behalf of the Netherlands and as the outgoing Chair, I would very much like to welcome all of you to the 56<sup>th</sup> session of the Joint Advisory Group, whether you are joining us physically here at the World Trade Organization or remotely.

Today, we are looking forward to learning more about ITC's achievements over the course of the last year and the impact ITC has had in connecting small businesses from developing countries into the global economy.

You have all received ITC's Annual Report for 2021 and I want to congratulate the ITC staff whose dedication and work is key to the excellent results and achievements documented in the report. ITC's support has been instrumental in putting thousands of small businesses on the path towards recovery and sensitized hundreds of policy-makers to the need for better policy environments for small businesses.

The Report demonstrates how ITC continued to deliver despite the challenging global context. It illustrates the organization's footprint by means of concrete examples and stories from trade experts and beneficiaries on the ground.

One such story is from the SheTrades West Africa project through which women MSME beneficiaries have generated more than \$1.5 million in sales. Juma Sackila, a cassava farmer from Liberia, received training through the programme which allowed her to develop a financial policy for

her cooperative. She states that this has significantly increased her revenue and trickled down to improve household gender dynamics. This is one of many examples of the role ITC plays in driving holistic on-the-ground change.

Many of these stories underline how much small businesses continue to be affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

We all know that developing countries were hit particularly hard due to their limited ability to use fiscal spending to protect their businesses. The war in Ukraine has added an extra layer of difficulty through increases in global energy, food and fertilizer prices.

The most vulnerable are hit hardest.

Throughout 2021, ITC was active in 132 countries and has continued to place focus on least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States. The latter is a group of countries the Kingdom of the Netherlands feels very close to, partly because of parts of the Kingdom are situated in the Caribbean. We always do our best to support their interests. These ITC priority countries represented over 80% of the country-specific interventions, and LDCs alone accounted for 45%.

Because of its impactful work for the most vulnerable, the Netherlands is pleased to be a partner in development with ITC. Last year, we launched the Netherlands Trust Fund V programme with a \$15 million commitment over five years. The programme will leverage digital technology to improve trade competitiveness in the agribusiness and tech sectors in 8 countries across Africa and Asia. It is now fully operational and we look forward to harvesting the results of our collaboration over the coming years.

Before I hand over my role as the Chair of the JAG to Her Excellency Ms. Usha Chandnee Dwarka-Canabady, Ambassador, Permanent Representative to the WTO, Permanent Mission of the Republic of Mauritius to the United Nations Office at Geneva, I encourage all delegates and partner organizations to continue, and where possible, expand their collaboration with ITC.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank ITC, WTO and UNCTAD for their continued strong collaboration as key institutional pillars of the Geneva trade hub. I commend their tireless efforts to push trade to be an engine for the Sustainable Development Goals. A shining example of their collaboration is the International Gender Champions Trade Impact Group.

This collaborative approach to inclusive trade has an impact far beyond individual organizations and I can only encourage the three spokes of the Geneva Trade Hub to continue their close partnership.

Small businesses play a crucial part in holding our societies together, particularly in developing countries. ITC's mission to integrate them into the global economy is an important building block to supporting resilience and recovery efforts in developing countries.

Thank you and over to you Ms. Usha Chandnee Dwarka-Canabady. I wish you best of luck in your important new role. I hope you will enjoy it as much as I have.