



Statement by His Excellency

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Coordinating Minister of Economic Affairs,

and Chief Negotiator

of The Government of The Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste

as an Observer to

The World Trade Organization

Geneva, Switzerland, 1 October 2020



Your Excellency Chairperson of the Working Party Ambassador Rui Macieira;

Your Excellencies Representatives of WTO Member and Observer Governments;

Distinguished Officials of WTO Secretariat;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

1. Good morning in Geneva and Good evening in Timor-Leste. First of all, please allow me to bring you warm and cordial greetings from the Government and the people of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste.

2. Mr. Chairman, on behalf of the members of my delegation, and on my own behalf, I wish to thank you, and all the members of the Working Party, for the warm reception accorded to us here in Timor-Leste and to our Mission in Geneva. I would also like to express our profound gratitude and appreciation to the WTO Secretariat for providing a virtual platform that has enabled Timor-Leste delegation in realizing this historical event as well as for the endless assistance and support during the Timor-Leste's accession process.

3. Mr. Chairman, we also greatly appreciate the presence of all the distinguished participants, both in person in Geneva and virtually from capitals, despite the difficulty amid the pandemic that has set the limits of movement of persons across the globe. Please accept our sincere words of gratitude.

4. Timor-Leste comprises the Eastern half of the island of Timor, the nearby islands of Ataúro and Jaco, and the enclave of Oe-Cusse Ambeno on the north-western side of



the island, surrounded by the Indonesian Province of West Timor and the Northern Territory of Australia.

5. Timor-Leste became the first new sovereign State of the 21st century, on 20 May 2002, when independence was restored, and the country faced with the daunting task of rebuilding its institutions and basic infrastructure from the ground up.

6. Trade is an integral part of our strategy and commitment for developing the economy and improving living standards. Our vision for trade and investment is that by 2030 Timor-Leste will have a dynamic and open trading economy that is integrated with regional and global value chains. Growing domestic and foreign investment will provide new opportunities for employment and transfer of technology helping to drive growth of traditional exports and development of new export industries. Timor-Leste has adopted a Public Private Partnership (PPP) approach through developing the necessary legislation and policy to facilitate our investment.

7. To achieve this vision, we will maintain an open and facilitating approach to trade that complies with our laws and regulations, as already reflected in our document on the Memorandum of Foreign Trade Regime (MFTR). We will work with existing businesses and new investors to address constraints to expanding domestic production and increasing our exports. We will also implement programs to improve overall economic competitiveness and accelerate the development of key sectors and sub-sectors.



8. As Members are already informed, besides Timor-Leste's commitment to WTO membership, Timor-Leste is also equally committed to seek for an ASEAN Membership. Therefore, Timor-Leste continues to ensure that these two accession processes can advance expeditiously while continuing to push for the necessary domestic reforms to facilitate trade.

9. Timor-Leste prioritizes WTO membership, as it would help to leverage the on-going improvements in its infrastructure, human capital, and administrative capacity, to accelerate growth and economic diversification. It would also set a stepping-stone for Timor-Leste's accession to ASEAN. Timor-Leste is fully committed to abide by the principles, objectives and rules of the World Trade Organization (WTO), as a Least Developed Country (LDC), and to implement domestic structural, legislative and policy reforms needed to comply with its future WTO commitments, to be defined in accordance with Article XII of the Marrakesh Agreement.

10. Concrete actions have already been taken to give consistency and coherence to such words. The Inter-Ministerial Commission and the national technical Working Group on WTO Accession, comprising of relevant Ministers, Senior Cabinet Members and line Directors, have been in place since July and working hard. In this context, I would also like to thank the Director-General and the WTO Secretariat for the technical assistance provided to our Government in advance of this meeting. To that end, with pleasure, I am happy to announce that, the Working Group has started the preparation of some negotiating inputs and will be formally submitted to WTO Secretariat for circulation to Members in the coming weeks.



11. There is a strong political will, across all partisan lines, in support of implementation of domestic structural, legislative and policy reforms needed to comply with its future WTO commitments, to be defined in accordance with Article XII of the Marrakesh Agreement Establishing the World Trade Organization.

12. Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates, having said that, as a Least Developed Country (LDC), Timor-Leste acknowledges the challenges ahead to attract foreign direct investment and develop domestic production as we are trying to diversify our economy beyond the oil and gas sector. These challenges will continue as the Covid-19 pandemic persists to exist, as also currently being faced by all the nations globally. At the same time, taking this opportunity, Timor-Leste would be open to the necessary assistance from Members and Development Partners, to accelerate Timor-Leste's membership to the WTO.

13. As we further contemplate and better understand what is required of us to become a full WTO member, we appreciate what a cumbersome, long and engaging process we are embarking on. We know it is not going to be easy, nor popular or straightforward, but we know that it is the way to go for our country.

14. Although Members are already aware, Mr. Chairman, please allow me to proudly report that Timor-Leste has already made a number of steps since we expressed our commitment towards our membership to the WTO. These include:

- Successfully submitted our Memorandum of Foreign Trade Regime (MFTR), which was circulated to Members in June 2017;



- Completed and submitted Replies to Members' questions, with prior endorsement of our Council of Ministers, opening the way for the today's historical Meeting;
- Completed the checklist on Implementation and Administration of the Customs Valuation Agreement;
- The Legislation Action Plan (LAP) was also developed and submitted to the Working Party in May 2020, together with the Q&R document. In this effort, Timor-Leste also completed several translations of the legislations.
- We will keep the Working Party updated regarding our latest development of the state of play of Timor-Leste's Legislative Action Plan.

15. It is our success in delivering the above-mentioned steps on time that made it possible for us to have this historic, first and very important Working Party Meeting.

16. To end this note, as Mr. Chairman has stated in his opening statement, on behalf of my delegation, I kindly ask for the Working Party's understanding to accept my absence in this historical meeting due to a parliamentary hearing on the State Budget, which is taking place in parallel with this meeting. With that note, I would therefore like to delegate my competency as the Chief Negotiator to my colleague, H.E. Vice Minister of Commerce and Industry, Mr. Domingos Lopes Antunes, to lead Timor-Leste's delegation during my absence.

17. Mr. Chairman, on this note, allow me to thank everyone involved in delivering the above milestone. This is indeed a historic moment for Timor-Leste! Please accept our highest appreciation and consideration of your warm welcome as well as for the



encouragements and support we have received from Members, the Director General and, the Accession Division of the WTO Secretariat.

18. Mr. Chairman, with your continued support and the unshaken determination of my government, I am confident that we will follow through the accession Roadmap already developed with the WTO Secretariat as planned and ensure that we meet the ambitious, but achievable target to become a WTO member by the end of next year.
