



Opening Statement

**His Excellency Eng. Joaquim Amaral
Coordinating Minister of Economic Affairs,
and Chief Negotiator
of The Government of The Democratic Republic of Timor-
Leste**

as an Acceding Country to
The World Trade Organization

5th Working Party Meeting

Geneva, Switzerland, 20th April 2023

Your Excellency Ambassador Rui Macieira, Permanent Representative of Portugal and Chair of the Working Party on the Accession of Timor-Leste to the WTO;

Your Excellency Director-General of the WTO, Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala;

Your Excellency Deputy Director-General of the WTO, Ambassador Xiangchen Zhang,

Your Excellencies Ambassadors, Representatives of WTO Members and International Organizations;

Distinguished Officials of the WTO Secretariat;

**Excellences,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Good morning.

First, I would like to thank the WTO Secretariat and the Chair for the warm reception given again to me and my team to Geneva and for the sustained dedication given to Timor-Leste during this process.

I would also like to thank all the members of the Working Party for your support and the combined work that made possible for us being here today.

I am honoured to be here to move forward in the work we started almost seven years ago. I am confident that you will agree with me

if I say that we are in the very final stretch for Timor-Leste to become a member of the World Trade Organization.

We also acknowledge that, when it happens, the accession of Timor-Leste will only be the beginning of a new and a challenging chapter.

We need to be humble and aware of our limitations as well as of the enormous tasks that lay ahead, not only as a member of the WTO but also as a prospective member of ASEAN.

I would like to emphasize that we come to this 5th Working Party Meeting with the purpose of letting this process close to an end. I am confident that our efforts and our openness to the requests from members will allow us to unbracket most commitments of the Draft Report of the Working Party.

Mr. Chairman,

Distinguished Members of the Working Party,

As you know, since Timor-Leste started down this road, we have worked relentlessly, and our commitments have been reflected in our actions. We have engaged with Members bilaterally and multilaterally, answering their questions and accommodating their requests. We have worked together with all of you, and we have made a tremendous effort to adapt and even to be creative to keep Timor-Leste in the fast-accession track.

I am confident that the Working Party will be in a position to adopt our final Accession Package very soon.

Mr. Chairman,

Distinguished members of the Working Party,

Today, we will discuss our progress since the last Working Party Meeting on our developments in the multilateral, bilateral and legislative fronts.

We are proud to show the effort made to honour our commitments and how determined we are with becoming a member of the WTO as indicated in our roadmap.

Last year, we circulated our revised Offers on Market Access for Goods and Services.

As you all know, the average bound tariff rate in our revised Goods Offer is 11.4%. This is the lowest average bound rate among LDC Members, and only 27 WTO Members – non-LDCs – have lower average bound rates. At the same time, this number is expected to be lower as the result of the bilateral negotiations between Timor-Leste and interested Members.

In the Services Offer, we have committed in a substantial number of services sectors/subsectors; 11 sectors and 88 subsectors as compared to 32 subsectors in our initial offer, reaching the total average of all acceded LDCs subsectors commitment.

We are conscious that we have committed to some sectors that are yet to be regulated in the country. We have done it to accommodate requests from Members and always trying to find the right balance between opening our services market and protecting our national

interests. Also, in response to Members' requests, we have revised our Most Favored Nations exemption list in line with our agreed offers to some Members.

Mr. Chairman,

Distinguished members of the Working Party,

I am pleased to report to the Working Party on the substantial progress achieved in our bilateral market access negotiations with Members since our last meeting, where we reported the signing of Bilateral Market Access Agreements with Australia and New Zealand.

We have signed Agreements with Canada and the Philippines earlier this year and, a few weeks ago, we signed a Bilateral Market Access Agreement with the European Union.

I am grateful and honored to announce you that, after concluding negotiations with Japan, we have also been able to formally conclude negotiations with Cambodia, and Thailand in the margins of this meeting. We plan on signing Bilateral Agreements with Japan and Cambodia within these days and with Thailand in the very next future.

I would like to share with the Working Party that we have also been relentlessly working together with the United States to conclude negotiations, and I am very pleased to say that, after a very productive meeting yesterday, our negotiations are about to be formally concluded in the next days or in the next very few weeks, pending on technical verifications from both sides. I would like to thank the United States for the dynamic and constructive dialogue.

We have intensively engaged with Indonesia, both through virtual means and in person, and we are confident that we will be able to reach an agreement with our valued neighbor and important trade partner very soon.

Thus, I am proud to report to the Working Party that Bilateral Market Access Negotiations with Members are almost concluded.

Once again, I would like to thank all Members for their constructive and substantive involvement. We remain available to meet for the closing discussions in any format and at any time following this meeting to finalize the process.

On the multilateral front, we provided responses to Members' questions and updated our inputs for the Draft Report of the Working Party prepared by the Secretariat. As reflected in the Draft Report of the Working Party, we have undertaken a total of 30 draft commitments, which now include a draft commitment to accede to the ITA and ITA-II upon accession. At the same time, we are actively working with the United States to revise specific wordings in the Draft Report of the Working Party to accommodate the United States' suggestions.

Mr. Chairman,

Distinguished members of the Working Party,

We would like to highlight that, despite our current status, Timor-Leste is fully committed to go beyond what's expected from an LDC.

This is reflected in our decision to commit with the Joint Initiative on Services Domestic Regulation and in our decision to take part in the ITA and ITA Expansion Agreement. My team is working closely with the WTO Secretariat experts to soon finalize Timor-Leste's ITA/ITA-II draft schedules and to circulate them to the participants of these Agreements in June.

These decisions are another evidence of Timor-Leste's willingness to fully engage in the multilateral trading system.

**Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Members of the Working Party,**

My report would be incomplete without an update on where we are on the legislative front. Consolidating our legal framework has been a priority pillar of our work in the last months. Since the last Working Party Meeting, we have continued drafting and adopting legislation needed for the accession and for the post-accession periods.

While we will provide a detailed report later today, I am particularly pleased to mention that we have already put in place most of the committed pieces of legislation. Almost all pending pieces that have not been circulated yet are already drafted and under technical revision in Dili.

We already shared with the Working Party the Decree-Law on Customs Valuation Agreement, and we have already enacted the two Decree-Laws on SPS (Animal and Plant Quarantine), to be shared with the Working Party soon after this meeting. We are also finalizing the internal discussions regarding the WTO Permanent Secretariat.

Regarding the TRIPS-related legislation, even if it goes beyond our initial commitment, we have already approved the Copyright Law and the IP Code is in the pipeline for approval.

The draft of new tax law has been finalized and translated and has been shared with the Working Party.

We are also developing key pieces of legislation which will be essential in our post-accession phase, including in the areas of investment, trade facilitation, customs, licensing, fiscal reform, export promotion, industrial policy, and services.

I would like to extend special thanks to Members and Partners who have supported us on this legislative work – we are very grateful, and we continue to count on your assistance in this final stretch and in the post-accession phase.

I would also like to mention that we continue to appreciate Members' consideration of our specific needs in this process as well as specific transition periods for the implementation of some of the future commitments, when and as necessary.

Mr. Chairman,

Distinguished Members of the Working Party,

As His Excellency Doctor Ramos Horta stated in his message, this process is an opportunity to accelerate important and necessary reforms which are essential to unleash the potential of our economy in several sectors.

The accession process to WTO, as well as to ASEAN, aims to transform Timor-Leste in a modern and diversified economy which,

in turn, will help to achieve our goal of becoming a growing, healthy, and well-educated middle-class Nation in the next decade.

At the same time, quoting on His Excellency's statement "*today's meeting reflects an important milestone and sturdy commitment from Timor-Leste, with a strong hope to conclude our discussion with Members on the outstanding issues, as we are moving closer to our Membership to the WTO.*"

I hope that my intervention and the discussions here today will confirm that we have managed to honour our commitments and that Timor-Leste is ready to become 165th Member of the Organization.

Thank you very much.