



BEST PRACTICES ON THE ACCESSIONS OF LEAST-DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

Opening Remarks

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His Excellency Prime Minister Hun Sen
Ministers from WTO Members and Observers
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning. On behalf of Director-General Roberto Azevêdo and the membership of the World Trade Organization (WTO), I would like to extend my warm welcome to the Fifth China Round Table. This is a privilege for me and all participants to spend the next four days in this beautiful historical city of Angkor.

On behalf of participants, I would also like to express appreciation to the Government of the Kingdom of Cambodia for hosting this Fifth China Round Table. In particular, we are honoured by the presence of His Excellency Prime Minister Hun Sen at the opening session this morning.

Let me also take this opportunity to commend the leadership demonstrated by the Government of Cambodia, led by His Excellency Prime Minister Hun Sen, for taking over the coordination of the WTO LDC Group last month. This is the first time that Cambodia is coordinating the LDC Group since it joined the WTO in 2004. And this is a serious undertaking, as leadership matters to the work of the Organization, in particular, at a time of uncertainty surrounding in the global economy.

The LDC Group is a key constituency in the WTO. The Group is not only active in various areas of work of the Organization, but also a strong supporter and beneficiary of the system. The Director-General strongly believes that the system must serve and protect interests of all Members, but first and foremost, starting with the group of most vulnerable economies. Therefore, the constructive engagement by the Group matters to the system. I am confident that, under the leadership from

the Government of Cambodia, the LDC Group will be able to advance their interests during this important year for the Organization.

I would like to pay tribute to the Government of China for its continuing support for WTO accessions in general, but in particular through the China's LDCs' and Accessions Programme - so called, the "China Program". Accession is a strategic priority for the Director-General and the membership. The annual China Round Table is the key and most visible pillar of the China Programme. In partnership with the Government of China and host governments from WTO Members, the WTO Secretariat has organized four China Round Tables since 2012, starting in Beijing in May 2012, followed by the Second Round Table in Luang Prabang, Lao PDR, in October 2013; Third Round Table in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, in May 2015; and, the Fourth Round Table in Nairobi, Kenya, in December 2015.

These Roundtables provided concrete contributions to support WTO accessions through policy dialogue and sharing experiences on accession and post-accession. It is not a coincidence that the Organization added six (6) more LDC Members since its first China Round Table in 2012. Indeed, some of the recently acceded LDCs in this room would testify that major breakthroughs in their accessions had taken place on the margins of the past China Round Tables.

Today, we are here in Siem Reap for the Fifth China Round Table, and the China Round Table process keeps maturing. It is making an important contribution to the rules-based multilateral trading system by improving understanding on accessions, both on the process and the substance, and providing a platform to support the integration of our most vulnerable economies into the multilateral trading system.

On behalf of the Director-General and the whole WTO membership, I would like to express sincere appreciation to the Government of China for the renewal of the MOU governing this program which we will sign immediately after the opening session. This is a testimony of China's commitment to the value and contributions of WTO Accessions, as evident in China's impressive economic growth after its accession to the Organization fifteen years ago. This is also a demonstration of China's leadership and contribution to strengthening the multilateral trading system.

Ladies and gentlemen,

WTO accession is a tool for integration into the global economy. As evident in the 36 concluded accessions since the establishment of the WTO, it has been used by the acceding governments as a platform to launch, deepen and consolidate domestic reforms, made in the framework of multilateral trading rules. These reforms have helped to transform their economies and to unlock growth and development potential, especially for LDCs, as evident here in Cambodia. While contributing to the reduction of trade barriers, WTO membership has also provided opportunities to these LDCs, with a platform to discuss of trade issues of importance to them, and also to build the trade capacity for continuation of economic reforms.

Currently, LDCs make up more than one fifth of the total WTO membership. Nine LDCs acceded to the WTO since 1995, and eight more are currently in the process of joining. Enhanced integration of LDCs into the multilateral trading system is an institutional priority. Last year, we welcomed Liberia and Afghanistan into the WTO family, following the conclusion of their accessions at the last Ministerial Conference in Nairobi in December 2015. The accession of these two LDCs has sent a powerful

signal to the international community about the ability of the WTO to deliver results and respond to the needs of post-conflict LDCs. Yet, WTO accession is a lengthy and often painful process. This is because WTO accession is about domestic structural reforms.

The theme of this Fifth China Round Table is "Best Practices on the Accessions of Least developed countries". This theme was chosen in response to the specific demand of the acceding LDC governments and the recently acceded Article XII LDCs. The objective of this Round Table is to have an honest conversation about LDC accession practices, drawn from an exchange of the actual accession experiences of those LDCs which have successfully concluded their negotiations and those LDCs which are currently still in the process of negotiation.

At this Round Table, we have gathered seven (7) LDC Article XII Members, which joined the WTO at different times, starting with Cambodia and Nepal in 2004; Samoa in 2012, Lao PDR in 2013, Yemen in 2014; and most recently, Afghanistan and Liberia in 2015. We also have the seven (7) LDC acceding governments, who are at different stages of their respective processes. Somalia and Timor-Leste just started last December, while the others have already been in the accession process for a long time, including Sudan since 1994, Bhutan (1999), Ethiopia (2003), Comoros (2007) and Equatorial Guinea (2008). These acceding governments are keen to learn from the experiences – good and bad but always useful - of Article XII LDC Members. I hope that the Round Table discussions will prompt their thinking on exploring the ways to advance LDC accessions, including for those acceding LDCs whose processes have been inactive for many years.

At this Round Table, the LDCs are joined by a number of WTO Members which have been particularly supportive of their accession. We

are also pleased that several international organisations are here with us today. They are partners with the WTO and its Members. I am hopeful that they will listen to the exchange of experiences and share their menu of possible support and assistance to respond to the specific accession needs of the acceding governments, as well as the post-accession needs of those recently acceded LDCs.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This Round Table is taking place at an important moment for the WTO. 2017 is a critical year for the WTO as we prepare for the 11th Ministerial Conference in Buenos Aires this coming December. It is also a critical year for WTO accessions, as several accessions are picking up their pace of work, including two LDCs – Comoros and Sudan.

During recent years, we have witnessed important decisions being taken by the WTO Membership in favour of LDCs, both to enhance market access opportunities as well as to ensure flexibility to pursue development goals. We hope that this trend will continue. It would be important that efforts are made to ensure that any outcome of the MC11 is of benefit to the LDCs. A range of issues are currently being raised by Members for possible outcomes at the next Ministerial Conference.

In this regard, it is encouraging that the year of 2017 has gotten off to a good start with the entry into force of the Protocol Amending the TRIPS Agreement, which eases access of developing and least-developed countries to medicines and, the Trade Facilitation Agreement. I would like to seize this opportunity to acknowledge the important role Members present here today have played in ratifying the TRIPS Amendment and the Trade Facilitation Agreement. The entry of these instruments into force, which took place on 23 January and 22 February, respectively,

signified Members' re-confirmed commitment to the multilateral trading system.

There are LDC-specific issues on which further efforts can be made. There has been good progress in the implementation of the decisions taken in favour of LDCs in Bali and Nairobi Ministerial Conferences. Still, more could be achieved in some areas such as duty-free and quota-free market access, preferential rules of origin and the LDC Services Waiver. And, of course MC11 is not the end of the road. Those issues that do not find resolution at MC11 can continue to be worked on. At the same time, focus will be kept on the implementation of existing decisions, and development needs will have to play a key role in everything we do.

In addition to the preparation to the 11th Ministerial, there are a series of major milestones ahead of us. We have the 6th Global Review of Aid for Trade in July, which is important for donors and beneficiaries, in terms of mobilizing resources to address the trade-related constraints identified by developing and least-developed countries. In September, we also have the annual WTO Public Forum.

Let me conclude by saying that there is a huge opportunity for the Organization this year to generate momentum and energize itself to respond to the challenges of the 21st Century. Article XII Members and acceding governments have a role to play and contributions to make. I believe that this Fifth China Round Table, as part of a process that was initiated in 2012, can make direct and concrete contributions to strengthen the WTO and contribute, in particular, to support achieving "deliverables" for the 11th Ministerial Conference in Buenos Aires.

We are privileged to have such high level participants and distinguished guests at this Round Table today. On behalf of the WTO, I look forward to hearing your insightful thoughts, ideas and suggestions during our discussions over the next few days.

I am pleased to join Prime Minister Hun Sen and Vice Minister Wang Shouwen to declare the Fifth China Round Table open, here in Siem Reap, Cambodia.

Thank you very much.
