

Opening remarks by the Chair of the 57th session

*By H.E. Ms. Nadia Theodore, Ambassador, Permanent Representative to the WTO,
Permanent Mission of Canada to the WTO in Geneva*

Madam Chair,

Executive Director Pamela Coke-Hamilton,

Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala,

Secretary-General Rebeca Grynspan,

Excellencies,

Distinguished participants,

On behalf of Canada and as the outgoing Chair, I welcome you all to the 58th session of the Joint Advisory Group, whether you are joining us in-person here at the World Trade Organization or remotely.

We have gathered here today to learn more about the many successes ITC has achieved in helping scores of small businesses in developing countries around the world.

Over the past year, I have seen firsthand how ITC has transformed how we understand trade.

Time and again, they have shown us that connected, sustainable, and inclusive trade is still possible, even required, especially during a time when crises seem to lurk around every corner.

They have been tireless advocates for MSMEs as the true drivers of the global economy, reminding us that the Sustainable Development Goals will only come within reach if we prioritize the people who can make them possible.

This year's JAG is a particularly special one. In just two days, we'll be celebrating ITC's 60th anniversary. Like any birthday, it's a moment not just to reflect on the highlights of the past—the challenges overcome, the dreams delivered—but also on what the next stage of ITC's life will be like.

This isn't, however, an exercise in crystal ball gazing. If we look at the ITC Annual Report 2023, we can see already the seeds that ITC has planted over its history, especially in recent years. We see where those seeds have started to grow, and what they could blossom into next.

I, for one, can't wait to watch.

The stories in the Annual Report are just a snapshot of what ITC is making possible for MSMEs around the world. That's a testament to the organization's dedication and its commitment to its mission and mandate.

I congratulate the entire ITC team, who have remained steadfast and diligent even amid global uncertainty. They are true champions for trade-led development, in both word and deed. I hope you can all take a moment this week during your celebrations to fully enjoy what you've achieved.

Now, I hope you'll allow me to share a few stories from this year's Annual Report, which to me stand out as being particularly illustrative of ITC's successes.

One such story comes from the "Alliances for Coconut Industry Development for the Caribbean" project, which earned the well-deserved nod in the environmental category for the 2023 United Nations' Small Island Developing States Partnership Award.

This project was a team effort, bringing together local, regional, and international partners every step of the way. It had as its goal the need to pair environmental stewardship with economic growth, doing so by supporting the development of Jamaica's coconut industry by bringing agri-businesses into alliances. These farmers were trained in climate-smart agriculture and diverse cropping systems and were able to share what they learned with

others. The lessons learned are now informing ITC's food security work across the wider Caribbean region.

Another inspiring story from the Annual Report comes from Africa. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is one of the most significant trade treaties in a generation, and it's one that's critical for delivering on the AU's Agenda 2063.

With this potential in its sights, ITC has put in place the One Trade Africa initiative, working to support women- and youth-led businesses so they can make the most of the AfCFTA's possibilities, while building capacity and supporting local institutions and governments.

The fruits of this work were on display late last year at the Intra-African Trade Fair in Cairo. It's one thing to hear about South-South trade and regional integration in theory. It's quite another to witness it in person: to walk the halls of these trade fairs and see entrepreneurs meeting prospective buyers, to sit in on export masterclasses, to try out some of the goods that small businesses throughout Africa are creating.

These stories of participating enterprises thriving and expanding their reach are what make us excited to continue our collaboration with ITC, both in supporting the AfCFTA's successes and in its wider work around the world.

Supporting inclusion remains a shared priority for Canada and ITC. On the margins of the SIDS4 conference last month, ITC and Canada discussed the next steps for the ITC-UN Women global campaign on gender-responsive public procurement.

Canada has already submitted its own statement of support and country pledge to this campaign. That's because we firmly believe that the more women-led businesses are able to win public contracts, the better off our society will be. We encourage other governments to do the same.

We are also expanding our work on inclusion into new areas. Just over a year ago, Canada and ITC discussed how to expand the organization's inclusive trade mandate. Specifically,

we talked about how to better support Indigenous communities as they participate in trade, and in a way that's tailored to their needs, contexts, and priorities.

This is a critical issue for Canada, and I am delighted that ITC is developing an initial pilot for a related programme on Indigenous Peoples and trade.

This is yet another example of what makes ITC such an extraordinary institution: they never lose sight of the fact that trade, first and foremost, is about people.

We believe, as ITC does, in ensuring that everyone can reap the benefits of what trade has to offer—whether you're a refugee living in the Dadaab complex or a vegan ice cream producer in Jamaica, whether you're a woman seeking to win a government contract for the first time or an artisan in Central Asia looking to reach new markets.

This is exactly why Canada remains a strong partner of ITC. We provide support for ITC's Window 1 budget, which remains instrumental in piloting innovative projects, such as the ones I mentioned earlier.

It's also critical for facilitating the development of global public goods, as well as supporting future project concepts and the four moonshots of gender, youth, digital connectivity, and green trade.

This allows ITC to use its core expertise to the fullest, investing its resources in the programmes and people who need it most.

We invite existing donors to continue their support and invite new donors to join the cause. For sixty years, we've seen ITC rise to the challenge of making lives better through trade. Your support is crucial for ensuring that tradition can continue, while making sure ITC is ready to meet the ever-changing demands of our age.

In closing, it has been a pleasure to be the JAG Chair of the 57th session, and I would like to thank the Executive Director and the JAG Secretariat for your support.

I now hand over my role as the Chair of the JAG to Her Excellency Ms. Hend Abdalrahman Al-Muftah, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations Office at Geneva.

Thank you.