

ITC JOINT ADVISORY GROUP (58TH SESSION)

OPENING REMARKS

25 JULY 2023, 10:00, GENEVA, WTO, ROOM W

Opening remarks

H.E. Ambassador Nadia Theodore of Canada, outgoing JAG chair

H.E. Ambassador Hend Abdulrahman Al-Muftah of Qatar, incoming JAG Chair

UNCTAD Secretary-General Rebeca Grynspan

ITC Executive Director Pamela Coke-Hamilton

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

1. I'm really happy to be here today – I thought I'd have to be travelling, but I was able to wiggle out of that obligation and join you instead!
2. As you might already know, I am an enthusiastic supporter of the work ITC does.
3. I always insist that trade and trade rules are anything but distant from people's day to day lives.
 - a. WTO rules for tariffs, health and safety standards, and technical regulations provide the basis for trading the goods people produce and consume every day.
 - b. Once our fisheries subsidies agreement enters into force – let me urge any members here who have not yet done so to deposit their acceptances – it will make a material difference to the health of marine fisheries, and to the livelihoods of the millions of people who depend on them.
4. But let's be honest: the connections are a little bit easier to explain when it's about ITC connecting women entrepreneurs in the Dadaab refugee complex to global markets and financing. Or helping Nigerian shea butter producers meet international quality standards, opening the door to lucrative new markets and sharply higher incomes.
5. My enthusiasm seems to be widely shared, since ITC keeps getting some of our most impressive ambassadors to chair the Joint Advisory Group.

6. I want to thank outgoing JAG chair Ambassador Nadia Theodore of Canada for her commitment to ITC, and welcome Ambassador Hend Abdulrahman Al-Muftah of Qatar to her new responsibilities. Their support is a sign of the high regard for ITC, and its Executive Director Pamela Coke-Hamilton, throughout the diplomatic community.
7. As you probably know, the WTO, like ITC, is marking a milestone anniversary this year – our thirtieth. So we've been looking back at the past three decades. Two takeaways are very relevant to our discussions here:
 - a. One, increased trade has contributed to faster growth in developing as well as developed countries, and helped lift over 1.5 billion people out of extreme poverty.
 - b. And two, many poor countries, and also many poor people and places in richer countries, did not share adequately in this progress.
8. Trade can be a powerful tool for addressing this exclusion. That's why at the WTO we are advocating to bring more countries and communities from the margins to the mainstream of global production networks – we are calling it 're-globalization'.
9. We think that this reimagined globalization would deliver dividends on multiple fronts: greater socioeconomic inclusion, but also greater economic resilience, since more diversified and deconcentrated supply chains would be less vulnerable to localized shocks, whether of the climate, public health, geopolitical, or some other variety.
10. Successful re-globalization requires open and predictable international markets – one reason we must push back against the current drift towards greater fragmentation and uncertainty in the global economy.
11. But there is a vital role for the kinds of supply-side support ITC has provided for sixty years – and that we will be looking at here and during the Aid for Trade Global Review later this week.
 - a. Re-globalization becomes an even more powerful force for inclusion when more MSMEs and women-owned businesses connect to international markets – and this is at the heart of what ITC does.

12. The WTO is proud to be not just a parent organization of ITC, but a longstanding partner.
13. Let me look at a few examples of how we are working together.
14. First, understanding international market dynamics and requirements is a prerequisite for businesses to take advantage of them. The WTO and ITC have worked together for years, along with UNCTAD and other agencies, to make trade information on tariffs and non-tariff measures more readily available.
 - a. The product has been platforms like the ePing alert system on new standards and regulations, ITC's Market Access Map, and the MSME-oriented Global Trade Help Desk, which complements our own Trade4MSMEs platform.
 - b. I was recently in Central Asia, where there is a lot of reform momentum and enthusiasm around trade, and I am sure businesses there will appreciate ITC's new Central Asia Gateway, which provides easily accessible information on market regulations in all of the region's main languages.
15. A second area of partnership with ITC is their work with members to help them implement and negotiate WTO agreements.
 - a. On trade facilitation, ITC has collaborated closely with our Trade Facilitation Agreement Facility to support members to implement TFA commitments – with a focus on ensuring that reforms respond to the needs of MSMEs.
 - b. ITC has been active on Investment Facilitation for Development, providing capacity building for developing countries to engage in the negotiations that were concluded at MC13 this past February, and to conduct needs assessments for the technical and financial support they may need to implement future commitments.
16. Third, ITC has been an active player in multi-agency efforts to support governments seeking to join the WTO, and last year helped countries including Iraq, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan advance their accession processes.
 - a. Following the accession of Comoros and Timor-Leste, we have 22 more countries in the queue – and they will be counting on ITC.

17. Fourth, ITC and the WTO have stepped up efforts to help members – and the planet – seize opportunities to use trade as a force for accelerating a just low-carbon transition. At COP28 in Dubai, trade had a higher profile than ever, with a 'trade day' of dedicated events and a Trade House Pavilion jointly hosted by the WTO, ITC, UNCTAD, and the International Chamber of Commerce.
18. Fifth, the WTO and ITC are working for re-globalization in action in the West African cotton-to-textile value chain, joining hands with FIFA, Afreximbank, UNIDO, and others to link the region's cotton to the \$200 billion-plus global market for football apparel – and to spur value addition and job creation in the process.
19. Finally, ITC is a powerful ally on using trade to drive women's economic empowerment, from the International Gender Champions Trade Impact Group, to its support for the WTO's Informal Working Groups on Trade and Gender and MSMEs.
20. The SheTrades platform is going from strength to strength, creating trade opportunities for women entrepreneurs, now with an eighteenth hub in Ghana.
21. I'm particularly proud that on the sidelines of MC13, we launched our joint fund for Women Exporters in the Digital Economy (WEIDE).
 - a. The WEIDE fund will support women owned MSMEs who are trading digitally to increase their competitiveness and access markets, regionally and globally. MSMEs selected through a competitive process will benefit from a grant complemented by technical assistance. The fund was launched with \$5 million dollars from the UAE – we're still fundraising, by the way - and the team plans to kick off interventions in September, starting in four developing countries.
22. To be clear, joint work with the WTO is just a small part of what ITC does. The annual report you will be looking at today provides highlights from ITC's work across the board. These range from leveraging tech to help Ethiopian coffee farmers tap into new markets that want full traceability, to helping MSMEs in Lao PDR get ready for the country's graduation from LDC status, and enhancing agricultural productivity and sustainable farming in the Caribbean.

23. Last year, as part of the 'advisory' component of the JAG, I'd warned ITC against spreading itself too thin, and urged it to scale up approaches that were working. I think it is moving in the right direction on both:
 - a. ITC's four 'moonshots' - green, gender, digital, youth – have helped focus its efforts in line with its Strategic Plan, and with the future of trade.
 - b. And while I'm probably biased, the WEIDE Fund is exactly the kind of scaling-up I had in mind.
24. A third bit of feedback was on avoiding inter-institutional turf wars among ITC, UNCTAD, and the WTO. I'd said then that the Geneva Trade Hub was working more harmoniously – possibly because we finally had three women in charge. The trend has continued, even if we're not all the way there yet.
25. Excellencies, let me now conclude. This week many of us will be thinking about Aid for Trade. It is what ITC has been doing for 60 years – since long before the term was coined. I want to take this opportunity to thank ITC and its supporters.
26. This Thursday at 4pm, ITC will host an anniversary event in CR to showcase highlights from its six decades of work to empower MSMEs and promote sustainable trade development. We hope to see many of you there.
27. Thank you very much.