

Opening remarks by the Chair of the 54th session

Statement by the Chair of the 54th Session: H.E. Ms. Athaliah Lesiba Molokomme, Ambassador, Permanent Mission of Republic of Botswana to the United Nations Office and other International Organizations at Geneva

Ambassador Kirsti Kauppi
Executive Director Pamela Coke-Hamilton
Secretary-General Mukhisa Kituyi
Deputy Director-General Yonov Frederick Agah,
Excellencies,
Distinguished participants,

I thank Ambassador Kirsti Kauppi for her welcoming words, and I am honoured to chair this year's Joint Advisory Group session. I welcome all participants to this 54th session of the JAG, and ask that you please join me in welcoming ITC's new Executive Director, Pamela Coke-Hamilton.

With an extensive background of working with the private and intergovernmental sectors across African, Caribbean and Pacific countries and a demonstrated ability to build trade-related institutional strength, I know that Pamela will do an excellent job at delivering on ITC's mandate at a time when strengthening MSMEs across the developing world is crucial in the context of COVID-19 challenges.

I thank Deputy Executive Director, Dorothy Tembo, for her skilled management of the organization throughout these turbulent times in early 2020 and I must recognise former ITC Executive Director Arancha Gonzalez for her leadership in 2019.

We all know what the International Trade Centre does. We all know how well they do it. We all know why investing in the ITC is investing in the recovery and resilience of our micro, small and medium enterprises. Today is your opportunity to share how ITC has helped you, and where it can do more and do better.

In that regard, I hope you would allow me to briefly draw on the excellent work ITC has done - and continues to do - in my home country Botswana. At the policy level, ITC has been giving support to mainstreaming trade into national development planning. ITC has supported the development of our national export strategy, which helped Botswana diversify her export-base and set our country on a path towards achieving middle-income status.

Since then, ITC has played an essential role in strengthening the Botswana Investment and Trade Centre with capacity building and providing market analysis tools for researching export markets. We are also collaborating on SheTrades and on building the ability of Botswana MSMEs to fully contribute to and benefit from the AfCFTA.

We look forward to working more with the ITC as we continue to implement our response to and recovery from COVID-19 in a comprehensive manner that would enable us to address our structural vulnerabilities and ensure resilience in dealing with crises in future.

Through the Trade Impact Group, co-chaired by ITC, Botswana and Iceland, we have also jointly raised the visibility of trade and gender, facilitated sharing of good practices and identified where and how gender barriers can best be addressed. This culminated in the launch of the Buenos Aires Declaration on Trade and Women's Economic Empowerment at the 11th WTO Ministerial Conference, and we continue to drive its implementation.

On a global scale, in 2019, ITC has delivered interventions in over 100 countries, of which 89% were priority countries, including Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Development States. This shows ITC's outstanding commitment to 'good trade' in the most vulnerable communities and to promote fair, inclusive and sustainable international trade and economic growth.

ITC has also continued to build on long-standing partnerships and develop new avenues of collaboration.

With its parent organizations - the WTO and UNCTAD, ITC has collaborated across many areas, including e-commerce, investment facilitation, women and trade, providing and analyzing relevant trade information, supporting WTO accessions, and tracking progress made towards the trade-related SDGs.

This year was extraordinary in many ways. As the COVID-19 pandemic related health crisis unfolded, lockdowns slowed down demand for goods and services, and MSMEs across the developing world were hard hit. As markets changed, logistical and trade linkages were disrupted, enterprises across the world needed to adapt their operations and rethink their business models.

For this reason, on-the-ground support gained importance, and I want to congratulate ITC for adapting its operations swiftly to the 'new normal.' The much-needed interventions to bolster inclusive and sustainable trade have continued, despite the challenges.

ITC has proven to be an agile organization throughout the pandemic and adapted swiftly to a virtual delivery mode through livestreams, coaching, webinars, and e-learning opportunities. It provided useful intelligence on trade restrictions with its Market Analysis Tools and provided targeted support to MSMEs so that they can access country-specific information and resources to weather the crisis.

As per the proceedings of today's meeting, you have the agenda in front of you. Unless I hear otherwise from you, I will proceed to adopt the agenda of the meeting and invite Secretary-General of UNCTAD, Mukhisa Kituyi, to deliver his statement. Dr. Kituyi, the floor is yours.