

Statement by the Chair of the 56th Session: H.E. Ms. Usha Chandnee Dwarka-Canabady, Ambassador, Permanent Representative to the WTO, Permanent Mission of the Republic of Mauritius to the United Nations Office at Geneva

Ambassador Bekkers,

Executive Director Pamela Coke-Hamilton

Deputy Director-General, Mr. Xiangchen Zhang

Secretary-General, Rebeca Grynspan

Excellencies,

Distinguished participants,

I thank Ambassador Bekkers for his warm welcome and am honoured to take over as the chair of the ITC's Joint Advisory Group this year.

Today's meeting will review ITC's body of work over the course of 2021 as described within ITC's Annual Report and I want to thank the ITC for this substantive report which I must say I read with great interest. It is rare to have an occasion to see an organization, look at its strengths, weaknesses, and to acknowledge those weaknesses and to say we actually can do better than this and we can move forward.

Let us remember the parameters of 2021, the second year of the global pandemic and a year where global inequalities continued to grow. While high-income countries benefited from high vaccination rates and their GDP gradually recovered to above 5% growth, the poorest 40 percent had not started to make up the income losses they experienced due to Covid-19 and stayed far below the income levels of pre-Covid-19 times. The decline in income added around 100 million more people to those living in extreme poverty.

The pandemic has not only exacerbated inequalities between developed and developing countries, but also within demographic groups. Women have lost more income, jobs and safety than men, and young people have lost more in years of schooling.

As COVID-19 caused reversals in fortunes for the poor and vulnerable, other crises continued to unfold in parallel. The challenges posed by climate change affect developing countries, such as mine – Mauritius – profoundly. We faced an oil spill last year. We are now facing a disaster in the making and need strong support in climate adaptation. The fallout from conflicts around the world and global inflation have now started to compound these challenges even further.

Throughout these turbulent times, trade stood out as one of the few promising developments. After severe disruptions, we witnessed a rebound in global trade, which fuelled the recovery of some countries. Especially for developing countries, which cannot rely on fiscal stimulus packages, trade recovery is a key mechanism to get back on track towards higher income levels.

We therefore need to support the important work that ITC does to strengthen developing countries' ability to export and I applaud ITC for all its achievements throughout 2021.

ITC has helped tens of thousands of small businesses to improve their competitiveness and transact international business.

Beyond more competitive enterprises, we also need a more enabling policy environment to enable trade. I congratulate ITC for having changed trade-related policies in over 90 cases and improved the performance of over 470 institutions.

In my own country, Mauritius, ITC has for example embedded its trade and market intelligence platforms into our national Mauritius Trade Easy portal. This makes it easier for small businesses to understand export requirements as well as opportunities and grow their incomes.

ITC has also been collaborating with Mauritius on a number of important projects aiming to consolidate the economic and trade pillars. I want to pick out one which is the Trade Obstacle Alert Mechanism. This is a platform that allows business operators to report trade obstacles, such as non-tariff barriers and other constraints which they might face in the course of exports and imports. We will be launching an updated version of the TOAM, as we call it, on 29th September by the Honorable Minister of Foreign Affairs to demonstrate the commitment that we have to fighting trade obstacles. What is interesting, though, is that similar to TOAM, a project is being carried out for the West African region as part of the West African Competitiveness Program, which covers 15 countries. It is also being done similarly through MARK-UP, which is a project in the Eastern African Community region. What the ITC is doing ~~without realizing it about consciously doing it~~, is taking up the Trade Obstacle mechanism and spreading it across regions in Africa. Therefore, the moment we start implementing the

African Continental Free Trade Area, we would have moved a long way already as we would already have in place mechanisms that will inform us what obstacles need to be cleared. We would have a lot of data by that time to be able to do this. So thank you for providing us with a mechanism, a single mechanism that helps us understand better the trade barriers within Africa itself.

Given the dramatic setbacks that the pandemic has brought for women, I want to especially commend ITC for reaching its ambitious objective of connecting 3 million women to market through the SheTrades initiative. SheTrades has been a hallmark for the economic empowerment of women and with over a hundred thousand active users on its platform. In Mauritius, we are counting on ITC to continue building on this work. Our own Economic Development Board is working closely with ITC to sign an MOU that will allow the launch of a chapter of the SheTrades project in Mauritius. We're looking forward to that.

Out of the priority areas of ITC, I personally appreciate the increasing focus on green competitiveness and I am glad to read that this priority is firmly anchored in ITC's new Strategic Plan. We must do more to help small businesses tackle climate change and become a force towards achieving net zero emissions. We are all concerned about the fact that environment could become a new trade barrier, and I think this is where we need to start working with everybody to ensure that environment does not constitute a trade barrier. But actually, we are working to make the environment central and important for all of us. We're not going to escape this. We're not going to escape climate change. I therefore can say that we very much welcome ITC focus on the environment.

I ask ITC's partners to continue their support for this important work and I invite other partners to join the cause of ITC. We need tangible support to enable developing countries to reap the benefits of trade and ITC's work continues to drive a more inclusive and sustainable global economy. The annual report demonstrates that an investment in ITC is a value-for-money contribution to achieving the SDGs in this decade.

As per the proceedings of today's meeting, unless there are objections, I will now proceed to adopt the agenda and invite Secretary-General Rebeca Grynspan of UNCTAD to take the floor.

Secretary-General, the floor is yours.