

It is my great pleasure to welcome you all to Nairobi for a

. Karibuni Sana. I take this opportunity to sincerely thank the WTO Secretariat and the University of Nairobi, School of Economics for organizing the first-of its kind regional dialogue meeting. Let me also extend my gratitude to the WTO, not only for co-organizing this conference, but also for the continued support it has extended to Kenya and the entire African continent. As a country, we are greatly honoured to host this session as an offshoot of having successfully hosted the 10th WTO Ministerial Conference for the first time in Africa in December, 2015.

WTO is unique. It is the only rule based multilateral trade organization. It provides a platform for member countries to negotiate trade rules that govern the conduct of multilateral trade. Since its inception in 1995, we have witnessed a tremendous increase in membership from 125 to 164 to-date. Clearly demonstrating confidence in the WTO and its role in promoting trade and the integration of countries into the multilateral trading system. The WTO accession process through which countries gain their entry, has been

critical in edging the WTO towards becoming a universal body.

With 43 African members, representing nearly one quarter of the 164-membership, Africa has become an important player in the multilateral trading system. A role that would be even more significant if the 8 countries on the queue for membership would join. Some of those are Neighbours situated within the Greater Horn of Africa.

This regional dialogue conference provides us with an opportunity, to among others, exchange views

the conference provides us with the opportunity to reflect on ways in which the WTO membership can foster regional integration and cooperation. This is crucial considering that the priority of the continent is to deepen and intensify regional economic integration. In the Greater Horn of Africa, most countries belong to similar economic blocs, namely, the East African Community, COMESA and IGAD. The member countries to these regional blocs are also part of the broader ongoing Tripartite and CFTA negotiations.

The accession of the sister countries in the region will directly contribute to the smooth finalization of the negotiations and ultimately promote intra-African trade which is extremely low compared to other regions of the world.

the conference seeks to mobilize support for facilitating and accelerating African accessions.

have negotiated their terms have grown faster, been more successful at attracting investments and shown greater resilience during economic downturns. In fact, it is becoming increasingly clear that countries are using the accession template to define the parameters of country specific reforms to adapt to a rapidly changing global economy.

Regrettably, as part of the organization is continuously renewed by accessions, some are still left behind. I would argue that it is in this context that the organization must reset itself, update its mission and make a key contribution that strengthens global markets. It is and was never about just rounds. Accessions have been at the forefront of trade negotiations, they talk to

domestic liberalization and address the fundamental raison d'etre of trade talks- "the opening of markets". It is in the paradox of these challenges and opportunities that I believe the WTO's role to contribute to solutions and to global governance actually lies.

I am confident that our deliberations in this conference will go a long way in contributing to ~~the~~ Regional Integration as a strategy of increasing trade and economic development. Regional Integration is one of the main priorities of Agenda 2063, the long-term development framework of Africa. It is also among the 5 priorities identified by the African Development Bank to be implemented in the next ten years.

It is indeed timely that this dialogue is happening in Nairobi, and by extension, in Africa at a moment when the negotiations for the Continental Free Trade Area are evolving rapidly. Just this week the technical working groups meeting in Durban has moved rapidly and aggressively to update and modernize the trade policy agenda not only continentally but globally, in ways that are quicker and faster than any other region. They made significant breakthroughs in trade in goods and services. As a participant in them, Kenya urges the WTO to be attentive to the progress being made in the CFTA. After all, movement is also about using the traction created by others to accelerate progress. That is timeless wisdom used by all to grow their economies and develop their countries.

