



**Third Regional Dialogue on WTO Accessions for Africa
Deepening Economic Integration in Africa through WTO
Membership and AfCFTA Implementation**

12 – 14 February 2020

United Nations Conference Centre

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

WTO Membership and the AfCFTA Implementation

Intervention by Mr Stephen Karingi, Director, Regional Integration and Trade Division, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA)

12 February 2020

Your Excellency **Mr Melaku Alebel**, Minister of Trade and Industry of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

Honourable Ministers, senior officials of the Government of Ethiopia,

Mr Alan Wolff, Deputy Director-General of the WTO,

Invited guests,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

Allow me to start by extending sincere greetings from Dr Vera Songwe, Under-Secretary General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), to the Government and people of our Host country Ethiopia and to all the participants of this important Dialogue. Dr Songwe also sends her regrets that she was unable to join you at this meeting due to prior commitments.

Before going into the substance of my intervention, please allow me to also express my gratitude at the fact that this event is dedicated to the honour and memory of Ambassador Chiedu Osakwe, that most inspiring and indefatigable campaigner for a multilateral trading system with rule of law and inclusive development at its core. A personal friend to many of us in this room, Osakwe was a voice for reason and for Africa in all multilateral fora. I take solace in the realization that Ambassador Osakwe died while servtmpa

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- The Doha Development Agenda, launched in 2001 with a four-year completion target and in which African countries placed all their hopes and expectations to inject development into the multilateral trading system, is about to celebrate its 20th anniversary with little to show for it;
- The WTO dispute settlement system with its unique Appellate review mechanism that has long been considered the jewel in the crown of global economic governance has effectively collapsed;
- Preferential and inherently discriminatory trading arrangements are increasingly undermining the multilateral trading system at whose core sits the principle of non-discrimination; etc.

In short, there are worrying signs that power-based bilateral diplomacy is on the ascendance while confidence in rules-based multilateral diplomacy is waning.

It is disconcerting to realize that this narrative forms part of the more widespread perception of a deeper crisis of economic globalisation.

In Addis and more broadly around Africa, on the other hand, the narrative runs in the opposite direction. Thanks to the adoption of the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and its speedy ratification, Africa is leading the way, affirming and reaffirming its confidence in a rules-based system of economic liberalization as a tool for inclusive and people-centred development.

This show of confidence is not limited to the governance of intra-Africa trade. On several occasions, African countries have reaffirmed their “attachment to the multilateral trading system” and their belief that “multilateralism remains the ... essential path to achieve inclusive and equitable development-oriented results

Just two weeks ago, our host country Ethiopia restarted its WTO accession negotiations after nearly eight years of inactivity.

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