Second high LEVEL Regional Dialogue on WTO Accessions

for the Arab region

"Adaptive Approaches to WTO Accession amid COVID-19"

7-9 February 2022

*Zoom*

Concept Note

The Arab region comprises eight acceding governments (Algeria, Comoros, Iraq, Lebanese Republic, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and Syrian Arab Republic), accounting for more than one third of ongoing WTO accessions. Four Arab countries (the Kingdom of Jordan, the Sultanate of Oman, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Yemen) have acceded to the WTO since its establishment in 1995. The majority of Arab countries that are still outside the WTO face a multitude of challenges that go beyond trade. These challenges have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a follow up to the successful first High-Level Regional Dialogue on WTO Accessions, held on 8-10 November 2020 under the theme "Arab Perspectives on WTO Accessions and the Multilateral Trading System", the second High-Level Regional Dialogue will also be organized virtually in collaboration with the Arab Monetary Fund (AMF) and the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) on 7-9 February 2022. The event will build on the previous dialogue which included sessions related to the accession process – the difficulties faced, the experiences learned, and potential solutions to assist acceding governments. Moreover, the regional dialogue will focus on specific topics of interest to Arab acceding governments, such as the role of the private sector, Trade Facilitation, Trade in Services and Trade for Peace.

The Second High-Level Regional Dialogue entitled "Adaptive Approaches to WTO Accession amid COVID-19" is organized to keep the momentum going among Arab acceding governments to help them advance closer to WTO Membership. Specific objectives of the event can include, inter alia:

1. To increase participants’ knowledge of the WTO accession process, accession-related rules, and the state-of-play of Arab accessions.

2. To deepen discussions by focusing on specific topics of interest to acceding governments, such as the synergies between regional integration and WTO accessions. Proposed topics are Trade Facilitation and Trade in Services.

3. To facilitate acceding governments to share experiences and lessons learned from the accession process by engaging with the private sector in accessions negotiations.

4. To discuss the role of the Trade for Peace Programme in enhancing Arab fragile and conflict affected (FCA) countries in accession to use trade as a vehicle for peace and stability for their countries and for the region.

*English and Arabic interpretation will be provided for the entire duration of the High-Level Dialogue.*

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Draft Programme

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| **DAY 1: Monday 7 February 2022** |
| **High-level Opening Session** |
| **Moderator:** Ms. Maika Oshikawa, Director, Accessions Division, WTO (TBC)  **Speakers:**  - Welcoming Remarks by H.E. Dr Abdulrahman A. Al Hamidy, AMF Director General Chairman of the Board (TBC)  - Remarks by Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Director-General, WTO (TBC)  - Remarks by H.E. Dr. Muhammad Sulaiman Al Jasser, Chairman of IsDB, (TBC)  - Remarks by H.E Dr. Majid Bin Abdullah Al Qasabi, Minister of Commerce, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (TBC)  (Coordinator of Arab Group) |
| **Session 1:  Overview and State of Play of WTO Accessions in the Arab Region** |
| **Speaker:** Ms. Mena Hassan, Economic Affairs Officer, WTO (TBC) |
| **Objectives:** Strengthen participants’ understanding of the WTO accession process and accession-related rules; and update the participants on the state-of-play of accessions within the region. |
| **Session 2: High-level Session**  **Experience sharing session between Arab Acceding Governments** |
| **Moderator:** Ambassador Xiangchen Zhang, Deputy Director-General, WTO (TBC)  **Speakers:**  - Algeria- Chief Negotiator for WTO Accession  - Comoros- Chief Negotiator for WTO Accession  - Iraq- Chief Negotiator for WTO Accession  - Lebanese republic- Chief Negotiator for WTO Accession  - Libya- Chief Negotiator for WTO Accession  - Somalia- Chief Negotiator for WTO Accession  - Sudan- Chief Negotiator for WTO Accession  - Syrian Arab Republic- Chief Negotiator for WTO Accession |
| **Objectives:** Experience sharing session between Arab Acceding Governments. This session will focus on the biggest challenges but also opportunities for WTO accession. |
| **DAY 2: Tuesday 8 February 2022** |
| **Session 3:  Trade in Services: Opportunities and Challenges Today** |
| **Speakers:** Mr. Hamid Mamdouh, Former Director of the Services Division, WTO (TBC)  - |
| **Objectives:** Demonstrate the ability to improve trade in services through adherence to WTO agreements and international best practices and the synergies and complementarities of the WTO Services Agreement and services under the GAFTA. |
| ***Short break*** |
| **Session 4:  The Role of the Private Sector in WTO Accession of Arab countries** |
| **Speakers:** Ms. Hilda Ali Al-Hinai, Secretary General, Arab-Swiss Chamber of Commerce and Industry (TBC)  **-** |
| **Objectives:** Encourage dialogue between the public and private sectors and mobilise joint efforts towards successful WTO accession. |
| **DAY 3: Wednesday 9 February 2022** |
| **Session 5:  Trade Facilitation amid and beyond COVID-19** |
| **Speakers:**  **-** WTO , AMF/ISDB |
| **Objectives:** Explain the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement and discuss how trade facilitation measures can be utilised to reduce trade costs, increase exports, and support post-COVID-19 economic recovery in the region. |
| ***Short break*** |
| **Session 6:   Trade for Peace through WTO Accession** |
| **Speakers:** |
| **Objectives:** Since many of the countries in the region are Fragile and Conflict Affected (FCA), this session will highlight the relevance and applicability of harnessing trade as a vehicle for peace through WTO accession in the Arab Region. |
| **Closing Session** |
| **Speakers:**  - WTO (TBC)  - AMF (TBC)  - IsDB (TBC) |