

**Remarks by Aggrey Tisa Sabuni
Presidential Advisor on Economic Affairs and Head Of Delegation,
First Working Party Meeting Of The Republic Of South Sudan's
Accession To the World Trade Organisation (WTO)
Geneva, Switzerland**

20th March 2019

H.E. Amb. Mohammad Qurban Haqjo, Chairman of the Working Party,

Representatives of the WTO Secretariat,

Excellencies, Ambassadors, and Heads of Missions accredited to the
World Trade Organisation (WTO),

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen.

I bring you warm and cordial greetings from the government and the
people of the Republic of South Sudan.

Mr. Chairman, on behalf of the members of my delegation, and on my own
behalf, I wish to thank you, and all the members of your team, for the warm
reception accorded to us here in this historic and great city of Geneva.

Mr. Chairman, we are also greatly appreciative of the presence of all these
distinguished people in this room, for being here for us. We do realize that
they have put aside everything that they could usefully be doing right now,
but instead they are all here to hear our story, the story of our quest to
accede to WTO. Please accept our sincere words of thanks.

South Sudan is a land-locked country. It borders Ethiopia to the East,
Kenya to the South-East, Uganda to the South, the Democratic Republic
of Congo to the South-West, the Central African Republic to the West, and
Sudan to the North.

South Sudan is about 644,000 km² with a population of about 12 million people, making it one of the most sparsely populated countries in Sub-Saharan Africa with an average population density of 19 persons per km².

Notwithstanding our small population, South Sudan is comprised of sixty-four indigenous tribes, making it one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world.

The country is also endowed with abundant natural resources including oil, fertile soil and fresh water. Approximately 75% of the country's land area is suitable for agriculture, although only 4 percent of the arable land is currently being put to use.

On July 9th this year, the Republic of South Sudan will celebrate its 8th anniversary as a sovereign nation, making it the youngest member of the family of nations on mother earth. The country came into being following a referendum, held in January 2011, in which 98.8% of the South Sudanese people voted in favour of separation from the Republic of Sudan.

This historic referendum was a result of long struggle following a tumultuous history, spanning some two hundred years in which the people of South Sudan resisted four consecutive foreign occupiers – the Ottoman Empire, Britain in collaboration with Egypt, and finally Sudanese Arabs, from whom we finally gained our independence on 11th July 2011.

Suffice to say that the resistance attracted reprisals that left the land as well as the people terribly devastated. This turbulent past has put the country on a long path of political and economic fragility.

Having waited for so long to have a government of their own, South Sudanese who definitely deserve better, have in some cases gone far to demand so much within a short time, that the young state found it very difficult to meet citizens' expectation.

As the country struggled with the daunting task of state building, the gap between citizen expectations and the ability of the state to meet the

expectation grew. Accordingly, trust in the ability of government to advance the best interest of citizens became the first casualty.

This created a fertile ground for political opportunists to agitate and further complicate the delicate situation. This fragility was to manifest itself in late 2013 when the newly independent country imploded into a civil war with many of the liberators breaking away to form rebel groups to challenge the same government that they once fought for and formed together.

The good news now is that a new and positive chapter has recently been opened through the conclusion of a peace deal. Representatives of all the key players are now working together inside Juba, implementing the peace agreement, with each promising to never again take the country back to conflict.

Words are not enough. The real question is whether the leadership have the leverage to do things differently. And also whether the rest of society, especially our citizens who happen to be mostly young, feel and believe that things will indeed be different?

It is critical questions like these that relate to our ability to exist as a viable state, that draw us to multilateral institutions such as the World Trade Organization, for guidance and inspiration. It is through institutions such as the WTO that we can prove our commitment to reforms at all costs.

We are determined to follow through our commitment, not because it is easy to become a WTO member, but rather because it is necessary for our country to prosper economically, socially and ultimately become politically stable.

Although politically we are proud to be independent, South Sudan still remains significantly dependent on its neighbor, the Republic of Sudan for its economic survival.

South Sudan's most important resource, oil, was discovered in the 1980s and the initial effort to exploit this resource was carried out in the context

of one Sudan, under the leadership of our brothers from the north while we were in the push fighting for our independence.

Notwithstanding the fact that most of the oil was and continues to be in the South, the oil infrastructure i.e. the pipeline connecting the wells to the international market, port infrastructure and refinery etc were strategically located in what is the present day Sudan.

Thus on seceding, South Sudan took control of its oil wells, but the country had to continue relying on the Republic of Sudan to access the international market.

Our experience with Sudan on the pipeline partly explains why South Sudan would like to join the rule-based WTO, which provides a better platform for negotiations and enforcement of trade arrangements.

Cognizant of our relatively small population and our turbulent past, South Sudan adopted an open market based economy as an easy and better way to stimulate economic growth.

Unfortunately, most of the economic potential still remains latent. Apart from oil, which currently accounts for nearly 90% of the budget revenues, 60% of its GDP and 95% of exports, South Sudan does not export much. However, studies have shown that South Sudan has significant potential in agriculture, mining, fisheries, forestry and tourism.

South Sudan's major economic challenges and constraints in trade are largely manifested on the supply-side. All key sectors in the country are nascent, and trade policy measures need to be carefully crafted to enable their development and increase competitiveness.

Accordingly, we believe opening up to the rest world is critical to attracting foreign investment, which is needed to develop and realize South Sudan's potential in other sectors, including jump-starting an industrial and manufacturing sector, not only to diversify the country's export basket, but also generating high productivity employment for our people, who are

mostly young (with over 70 percent of the population falling under 35 years of age).

In line with South Sudan's open market policy, we have adopted an Industrialization Policy that encourages the need to attract private investment to support industrial development in the various sectors of the economy.

Accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) is critical to achieving our dream for private sector led growth. Our government recognizes the role of WTO membership in: (i) providing a level-playing field in the multilateral trading system; (ii) contributing towards poverty eradication by creating jobs for vulnerable groups such as women and the youth; (iii) promoting peace and state building; (iv) attracting foreign direct investment; and (v) increasing access to international markets.

Our Government therefore stands committed to undertake the required reforms for WTO accession in accordance with the principles of the rule of law, transparency, good governance and respect for human rights.

South Sudan has also applied and was successfully admitted to the East African Community, which to us is a critical milestone in our endeavour to join the WTO. As you may all know, our five other Partner States in the EAC (Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda and Burunda) are all members of the WTO. Thus, acceding to the WTO will put us on equal footing with the rest of our EAC Partner States

More importantly, EAC is WTO compliant. Our membership in the EAC and following through with our commitments there will directly translate into complying with the WTO. This complementarity between EAC membership and WTO accession should not only lighten the implementation burden but also reassure WTO members that our endeavor to join this esteemed club is indeed part of a well-thought through agenda that we do not take lightly.

As we further contemplate and better understand what is required of us to become a full WTO member, we appreciate what a cumbersome, long

and engaging process we are embarking on. We know it is not going to be easy, nor popular or straightforward, but we know that it is the way to go for our country.

If there is one positive thing that war has taught us, it is that victory awaits the one who is focused and remains steadfast to its goal, no matter what. We know that the going will get harder by the day; but we also know that when the going gets tough, only the tough keep going. It is on this basis that we refused to give up when our first application in for Observer Status in 2012 did not materialize. Instead, we continued to knock on the doors of the WTO until we were granted Observer Status in December 2017 and now seeking full membership.

And more importantly, all journeys, short or long start by a mere single step. Although you already know, allow me to proudly report we have already made a number of steps since we expressed interest in full membership a little over a year ago. These include:

1. Successful drafting and submission of our Memorandum of Foreign Trade Regime (MFTR), which was circulated to members on 21st December 2018
2. Responding to questions on the MFTR from Canada, which were circulated to members on 20th February 2019, and
3. Drafting our Legislative Action Plan, which was also circulated to members on 20th February 2019.

It is our success in delivering the above-mentioned steps on time that made it possible for us to have this historic, first and very important Working Party Meeting.

On this note allow me to thank everyone involved in delivering the above milestone. My special thanks go to the WTO Secretariat staff for their technical guidance and encouragement.

With your continued support and the unshaken determination of my government, I am confident that we will follow through the accession Roadmap already agreed with the WTO Secretariat as planned and

ensure that we meet the ambitious, but achievable target of getting us in within **5 years**.

To ensure that we maintain momentum and keep to our proposed target, it is our goal to have the next Working Group Meeting before the end of the year.

Excellencies, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, thank you so much for listening