

Opening Remarks

By

Tswelopele Moremi, Executive Secretary, Southern African Customs Union

Minister Mpahlwa

Your Excellency, African Ambassadors based in Geneva,

Representatives from the Commonwealth Secretariat

The Executive Director of tralac, Trudi Hartzenberg

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

1. It is a great pleasure for me, ladies and gentlemen, to address you at the end of the first day of this Africa Regional Workshop on WTO Negotiations. As we prepare for the Sixth Ministerial Conference to be held in Hong Kong in December this year, it is important that we fully appreciate the challenges facing Africa for effective participation in the process of negotiating international trade rules. Much more importantly, it is important to focus on the final outcome of achieving the development objective of the Doha Round which is critical for the masses of our people on the African continent.

2. Therefore, sound trade policies and a trading environment that facilitates Africa's effective participation in international markets are important. To achieve this, capacity for full engagement in international trade negotiations is necessary.

3. This workshop should, therefore, provide an opportunity for us to take stock and to focus our capacity and energy in the short time that remains until the Hong Kong Ministerial Conference. The priority accorded to trade matters in various fora, including the July meeting of the G8 at Gleneagles and the Commission for Africa, underscores the importance of bringing the Doha Round to a successful conclusion, and in particular, to ensuring that it is truly a **Development Round**.

4. However, while we focus during this workshop on the WTO negotiations, there are also important developments in the complex arena of regional trading arrangements, both on the African continent and for Africa with external trading partners. African countries are committed to refining their integration agenda, and strategically renegotiating their relationships with key external partners. As we do this, the imperative of consonance of these developments with WTO Agreements is not negotiable.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me share with you some developments in the southern African region:

5. As you are aware, in 2002 the Southern African Customs Union (SACU) member states concluded a new Agreement. This Agreement takes into account the outcomes of the Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations and explicitly invokes WTO disciplines in several of its provisions.

These considerations must guide SACU in its legal and institutional development to implement the new Customs Union Agreement, and to define its regional and global trade and broader integration strategy. But this requires more than commitment and political will; it requires significant capacity at the regional level, as well as at member state level.

6. SACU is currently negotiating several free trade agreements simultaneously, with several more due to start soon. The trade agenda for SACU, as is the case for Africa too, is growing in scope and complexity. This requires:

- **Strategic capacity:** to develop national and regional trade policies that articulate with their broader development strategies
- **Negotiating capacity:** to negotiate trade agreements that can promote development

7. SACU is also deeply committed to broader African integration, and in this regard is seeking to start engaging with African partners.

These are challenges that we have to deal with as we deepen SACU's regional integration, SACU's integration into the African continent as well as its integration into the global economy on a competitive basis.

At this workshop, we have an opportunity to identify key challenges for successful trade negotiations, so that priorities for building Africa's capacity to engage effectively in trade negotiations, can be identified.

We therefore welcome engaging with other African countries.

In conclusion, ladies and gentlemen,

Trade can contribute to Africa's development. It is true that trade negotiations will involve trade-offs, and choices. However, if these are informed choices and trade-offs, we can achieve a Doha Development Outcome not a Doha Development Compromise.

Thank you