

**Inaugural ceremony of the Annual Session  
of the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO**

**21 March 2011**

Talking Points for the Chairman of the WTO General Council,  
Ambassador Yonov Frederick Agah

- Excellences, Distinguished Parliamentarians, Ladies and Gentlemen.
- Allow me first to say how pleased I am to be here with you today and to be participating in this inaugural ceremony of the Annual Session of the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO – the first ever to be hosted by the WTO. This fact is testimony to the growing relationship between the WTO and parliamentarians, and your key role in international trade and WTO activities.
- You, the *Parliamentary Conference on the WTO*, have been following our work, and in particular the Doha Development Agenda closely since its launch in 2001. And this is as it should be – your understanding of international trade is essential to fulfilling your constitutional role in ratifying WTO agreements and in ensuring the transparency and legitimacy of our activities.
- I am aware of the increasing outreach activities by the WTO Secretariat which seek to inform and engage with parliamentarians on issues related to the Doha Development Agenda. In my opinion, this interaction reflects not only the growing awareness and interest among your constituency, but it also stands testimony to the continued and ever-increasing transparency and accountability of the multilateral trading system.
- Today the world is faced with very real and complex difficulties: food prices are rising, unemployment levels across the world continue to tear at the core fabric of our societies; we have witnessed an unprecedented sequence of natural disasters; and there has been tremendous political unrest. All these factors have in different proportions and magnitudes contributed to the sombre state of the world economy. This is the grim backdrop against which the multilateral trading system currently operates.

- The situation is challenging but not hopeless. Signs of hope have already begun to emerge. For instance, compared to the same period one year ago, the value of world merchandise trade has increased 17% in the fourth quarter of 2010, and trade values have now recovered to pre-crisis levels. Trade volume is forecast to grow by 13.5% in 2010. There is light at the end of the tunnel.
- International trade has continued to play its vital role as the engine of growth for the world economy. But it needs a serious and urgent refuelling to be able to more fully play its critical role in global recovery, and more so, at this time of social and economic hardship. Clear, strong and unequivocal messages of political confidence and determination to conclude the Doha Development Agenda negotiations are part of the signals the world urgently needs as a contribution to global economic recovery. This gathering provides such an opportunity and I urge you to seize it.
- Let me now briefly provide you with an update of the state of play in the Doha negotiations. Since early this year, in line with a clear commitment by the G20 and APEC leaders – which was further bolstered by Ministers at Davos – to conclude the Round in 2011, work has intensified in all areas and at all levels – multilateral, plurilateral and bilateral. There has been a marked positive change in both mood and gear in the Negotiating Groups and in the bilateral/plurilateral consultations.
- Members are working towards having texts in all areas by around Easter, to have a comprehensive package by July, and to finalize the Round by the end of 2011. There is tacit agreement that progress should build on what has already been achieved and that the "acquis" should not be unravelled. Members have also agreed, within the cocktail approach in which they have been operating, to continue a process of variable geometry of meetings, but with full respect for transparency and inclusiveness. Development remains at the core of this negotiation.
- While there has been meaningful progress in many areas and work is advancing on developing draft language and textual proposals, the pace is not only too slow, but lacks the substantive breakthroughs that would enable Members to meet the goals they have set for themselves.

Bluntly put, there is a need for urgent and major acceleration of work at all levels – multilateral, plurilateral and bilateral – that will produce the raw material for the Negotiating Group Chairs to develop texts.

- Greater leadership, courage, political engagement and hard bargaining are fundamental if we are to conclude the Doha Round in 2011. I cannot stress enough that parliamentary support in this endeavour is crucial, and I appeal to you to support and urge on your negotiators and capitals towards this objective. Failure to act now – before this very narrow window of opportunity closes further – will be very hard felt by a world that is looking to us for some good news, and could seriously weaken the multilateral trading system which has served the world so well for so long.
- The WTO is currently in a period which could go down in history as a time when its Members collectively showed the faith and courage to make the tough but necessary decisions that enabled a balanced and ambitious conclusion of the Doha Round. We have the opportunity to contribute to urgently required global economic recovery, to create opportunities for more market access, to contribute to job creation and to contribute to development gains. We would be unwise, if we let this opportunity pass us by. I will be counting on your invaluable help to make sure that this history is recorded as a success – for the world at large. Now, more than ever, is the time for all to work together for a common good.
- I thank you, and wish you all a productive Annual Session.