

**ADDRESS BY HON D. GOKHOO,  
MINISTER OF INDUSTRY, SCIENCE AND  
RESEARCH**

**ON THE OCCASION  
OF  
WTO REGIONAL WORKSHOP  
ON  
TECHNICAL BARRIERS TO TRADE FOR  
AFRICAN COUNTRIES**

**TUESDAY 12 MAY 2009  
LABOURDONNAIS WATERFRONT HOTEL  
AT 0930 HRS**

**Hon. Arvind Boolell, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional  
Integration and International Trade**

**Mr. Erik Wijkstrom, Counsellor, Trade and Environment  
Division, WTO**

**Resource Persons from WTO, European Communities,  
UNIDO, FAO, SADC Secretariat, South Africa Standards  
Centre, DTI South Africa**

**Overseas Participants**

**Distinguished Guests**

**Ladies and Gentlemen.**

A very good morning to you all and a very warm and cordial welcome to our overseas guest and in particular to the resource persons.

It gives me great pleasure to be among you this morning on the occasion of this WTO Regional Workshop on Technical Barriers to Trade for African countries. First of all, allow me to extend a warm welcome to all the personalities from the different

organizations, the resource persons and the overseas participants who have come from a long way to join us and share their experiences.

We are also thankful to the officials of the WTO who have worked in close collaboration with those of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade, to organize this important workshop for the benefit of policy makers and support organizations.

I understand this workshop forms part of its Biennial Technical Assistance and Training Plan 2008/2009.

### **Building Capacity**

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

This workshop indeed constitutes another important event for knowledge dissemination and experience sharing for the laudable goal to build capacity in Africa on WTO issues. African economies, as part of developing and least developed countries, need to have their voice heard during negotiations at the WTO and our level of preparedness is fundamental. Also, the more knowledgeable we are on trade issues, the better we can shape our policies and strategies to successfully integrate the global

economy. Also, we have been aspiring to contribute more forcefully in the evolution of international relations and multilateral rules so that we have a rightful place in the mainstream of global economic development. We have also to support economic operators in their efforts to meet global market requirements and to adapt to multilateral rules of the WTO. Ultimately, I am convinced that the power of knowledge can help us achieve these goals and capacity building through such workshops like today can contribute significantly.

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

I understand that the agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade has a fundamental objective to discourage use of standards, technical regulations and conformity assessment procedures as non-tariff barriers. The objective is to prevent the emergence of undue layers of technical requirements and assessments procedures. Many analysts of international trade believe that internationally harmonized standards, as encouraged under the agreement, enable products and services of different origins to be compatible and inter-operate globally. They also consider that non-tariff barriers can put trade at a tremendous disadvantage in terms of dictating terms and preventing access to global markets. It is a matter of fact that products conforming to international standards enjoy

widespread market acceptance as they are associated with reliability, safety, compatibility and quality.

On the other hand, harmonized standards relating to testing, certification and accreditation can help lower trade costs through lower production costs for products sold in multiple markets. And now, at this juncture of the global financial crisis, the reflex for protection naturally resurfaces and temptation to use non-tariff barriers is more widespread. The agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade which spells out clearly areas for technical regulations should contribute in minimizing protectionism through non-tariff barriers such as technical regulations. For a country like Mauritius, with heavy reliance on international trade, the implication is huge.

Ladies and gentlemen,

However, one key implication is the ability to respond to the internationalization of standards and conformity requirements. Development of supply-side capabilities becomes critical and It is here that support from international organizations and regional cooperation have all their importance and relevance. We are glad therefore that such workshops like the present one are organized regularly.

## **Objective**

I fully support and commend the objective of this workshop to assist participating countries from the Region to improve knowledge of the principles and disciplines of the TBT Agreement. I consider the objective set to inform participants of the work and current discussions in the TBT Committee as critical as it promotes a more effective participation of the Region in the Committee's work. Participants will also have the opportunity to share experiences on TBT issues and all these therefore can only but help us participate more effectively in committees or negotiations, at the WTO. I believe, it is very important that the knowledge and information gathered during the three days of the workshop reach downstream to the operators.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In Mauritius, we have set up our national quality infrastructure with the twin objectives of,

- Ensuring that goods and services on the local market are of good quality, safe and reliable, thus enhancing consumer protection; and
- Supporting exporters to become more competitive on the global market.

The national quality infrastructure comprises two key institutions, namely the Mauritius Standards Bureau (MSB) and MAURITAS. The MSB was also designated as the National Enquiry Point for Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) matters. A second Enquiry Point on SPS (Sanitary and phyto-sanitary) issues operates within the Ministry of Agro Industry, Food Production and Security

In operation since 1975, the MSB is involved in standards development, testing, metrology and quality assurance services through operation of a National Management System Certification Scheme. The Bureau is extending its services, from testing of food to building materials and is also actively involved in the regional work with the SADC and the COMESA.

In line with WTO-TBT Agreement, MSB has adhered to the Code of good practice for the preparation, adoption and application of standards.

Our objective is to make the MSB the first port of call of operators as regards TBT standards and compliance issues and in this regard due attention is being given to improving further its business delivery services. Seven projects for technical assistance have been

retained by the AFD for upgrading of MSB services for testing, consolidating certification, and for an enhanced regulatory framework.

On the other hand, the MAURITAS, the national accreditation service was set up in 1998. More recently, it has been more active in the accreditation of laboratories but has a long way to go in the accreditation of certification and inspection bodies. To further boost the recognition of our national accreditation system, our national metrological infrastructure will be consolidated where significant improvement in the present metrology services and development of new services will be emphasized. Government has invested in testing laboratories during the past few years with a view to offering a wide range of testing services which would accompany all economic sectors.

### **Regulatory Framework**

We will shortly review the technical regulatory framework in Mauritius to further ensure that technical regulations are based on international standards as far as possible and are harmonized with other member states. The objective is to ensure compliance with the requirements of the WTO-TBT Agreement. All goods, local or imported, will be given the same treatment, as regards to

conformity assessment procedures and legal control while ensuring fair trade and the protection and safety of consumers, animals and plants.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We have to keep in mind that while addressing the TBT issues, we have to promote the ability of business operators to comply with them. A major constraint lies in the ability to obtain certification from overseas approved body, in the absence of domestic certification bodies. And, the cost is often prohibitive to SME's. This is a problem for other African countries as well.

In this regard I am happy to note that as a follow up, the workshop also provides for a component on technical assistance for the implementation of an Action Plan to be worked out by the participants during the course of the workshop. Altogether, therefore this workshop will have the laudable objective to disseminate information, discuss issues relevant to the African continent and develop proposals for much needed technical assistance.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

With these words, I thank you for your attention and wish you all a fruitful deliberation in the workshop.

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