Statement by
Her Excellency Mrs. Martha Lungu Mwitumwa
Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Republic of Zambia
Chairperson of the Group of 77 and China
at the Sixty-Seventh Session of the Trade and Development Board

Agenda item 8: Activities undertaken by UNCTAD in support of Africa

President of the Trade and Development Board Ambassador Federico Villegas,
Director of the Division on Africa, Least Developed Countries and Special Programmes,
Mr. Paul Akiwumi,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

1. At the outset the Group of 77 and China wishes to thank UNCTAD for its work in support of Africa through all its five subprogrammes and three pillars of work. The contribution of UNCTAD is vital in ensuring that African countries and developing countries in general progress in their development objectives and in their quest to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Mr. President,

2. In these unprecedented times of the COVID-19 pandemic, African Countries have been disproportionately affected in the sanitary, economic and social dimensions due to their vulnerable positions already before the pandemic struck. These countries therefore are, more than ever, in dire need of support to address the emerging challenges of the times we live in, as well as the long-standing pervasive development challenges that continue to be present. Through its three pillars of work, UNCTAD has embarked on various activities in Africa with a focus on the structural transformation that African economies need, while tackling vulnerabilities and building resilience, improving competitiveness, enhancing multilateralism, and thus empowering people and investing in their future. As a development institution mandated to assist developing countries through the integrated treatment of trade and development and interrelated issues in the areas of finance, technology, investment, and sustainable development, UNCTAD provides valuable means for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, which should continue if we are to take seriously our plight for a holistic approach to development.

Mr. President,

3. There are many UNCTAD initiatives that are already underway in Africa, such as support for the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). The Economic Development in Africa Report 2019 provided important insights by pointing out that boosting intra-African trade through the AfCFTA depends on the effective implementation of rules of origin, as a critical policy instrument for preferential trade liberalization among member States; as well as highlighting the essential nature of adopting lenient and flexible rules of origin and strengthening institutional capacities to ensure impartial, transparent and predictable implementation of agreed rules of origin. The African Continental Free Trade Area constitutes a massive framework that is envisioned to lead to significant increase in trade within the continent thus making massive contributions to structural transformation
and development. The Group of 77 and China believes UNCTAD should continue to support African countries and institutions in the process of developing these rules of origin, as these are indispensable to realizing the envisioned gains of the ACFTA as envisioned. This support should include appropriate package of advisory services, guidance and training, and complemented by related support such as on the collection and dissemination of comprehensive information on all currently applied trade-related regulations, including sanitary, phytosanitary and technical requirements to contribute to the success of the AfCFTA.

Mr. President,

4. The Group of 77 and China appreciates the role UNCTAD continues to play through its work on the reform of the international investment regime, as many African countries continue to work on updating their International Investments Agreements; as well as through its Investment Policy Reviews (IPRs) undertaken in several African countries. The Group calls on UNCTAD to continue this support and upscale its IPR work to include other countries that have requested such support for the betterment of their investment policies, in particular to align with applicable development objectives.

Mr. President,

5. UNCTAD, through the Digital Economy Report 2019, entitled *Value Creation and Capture – Implications for Developing Countries* examined the scope for value creation and capture in the digital economy by developing countries, including in Africa. The Group notes the effects of the widening digital divide across the continent that eventually threatens to leave developing countries, particularly least developed countries in the continent, further behind. In this regard, the Group calls upon UNCTAD to continue its work the digital economy and e-commerce to continue on a path to digitalize African economies. This includes UNCTAD’s work in reviewing the opportunities and challenges related to e-commerce in Africa, while focusing on the role digitalization can play in fostering social economic development in the continent. The wider the persisting digital divides, the more we need to upscale the digital economy and e-commerce support to the continent as a contribution to reducing trade-related inequalities, for instance through the shaping of policies on data protection, gender, inclusion, cybercrime, taxation, informal trade, and consumer protection.

Mr. President,

6. The Group underscores the importance of the Science, Technology and Innovation Policy (STIP) reviews and urges UNCTAD to continue identifying and conducting these reviews in other countries, as well as the Rapid eTrade Readiness Assessments. In this regard, the Group wishes to urge UNCTAD to resume activities such as the Africa E-Commerce week, which are a significant step in translating innovation and technology related development knowledge into a continental dimension.

Mr. President,

7. Trade in commodities is still one of the main sources of revenue for most African countries, yet commodity dependence poses importance challenges for those same countries. UNCTAD has been working with African countries to help them overcome key challenges associated with commodity dependence and enhance value addition. Activities such as the promotion of cotton by-products in some African countries is one of the ways of identifying opportunities which could be explored on the continent and an approach that could be replicated with an array of commodities common in the region. Increasing value addition and diversification is one of the key strategies African countries are employing in increasing their trade viability and sustainability in a quest to reduce commodity dependence. Furthermore, the Group urges UNCTAD to continue providing assistance to African Countries to boost competitiveness and promote integration into regional and global value chains which has the potential of creating employment opportunities, particularly for vulnerable populations including women, farmers, entrepreneurs and the youth.
8. The Group further welcomes UNCTAD work in implementing and identifying regional value chains in Africa as well as enhancing structural transformation in key partner countries of the Belt and Road Initiative, aimed at sharing lessons in the areas of trade and industry, finance, the digital economy and debt management. The Group further appreciates UNCTAD work in providing capacity building in trade facilitation activities and calls on UNCTAD to expand its work in this area to include more African Countries.

Mr. President,

9. The Group commends UNCTAD for the work delivered through the ASYCUDA system, which continues to facilitate trade increase and secure customs revenue, reduce clearance times and trade costs, help in assessing customs performance, and combat illegal trade. The Group urges UNCTAD to continue this work and expand ASYCUDA coverage in Africa with a view to increase revenue capture and increase efficiency of customs operations.

10. Similarly, the DMFAS programme continues to be a vital tool to manage debt as it provides a comprehensive debt database for operational purposes and reporting, while providing capacity-building opportunities for debt management officials in debt data validation, statistics, portfolio analysis and operational risk management. UNCTAD should continue assisting developing countries through the DMFAS programme, in particular to African countries that are experiencing increasingly important debt management challenges.

Mr. President,

11. Before closing, the Group of 77 and China would like to welcome the cooperation between UNCTAD and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in measuring illicit financial flows, as a means to help African countries combat development challenges posed by such illicit activities. In this context the Group welcomes the guidelines designed for measuring illicit inflows and outflows of financial activities and calls on UNCTAD to upscale such support to other African countries to enhance the availability of statistics on illicit financial flows on the continent.

I thank you, Mr. President.