

Ms. Rebeca Grynspan, Secretary-General of United Nations Trade and Development (UNCTAD),

H.E. Ms. Cham Nimul, Minister of Commerce of Cambodia,

H.E. Ambassador Luke DAUNIVALU, Permanent Representative of Fiji to the United Nations Office in Geneva and chairman of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts (IGE),

H.E. Gerelmaa Davaasuren, Ambassador of Mongolia to the UN (and vice chairwoman of IGE),

H.E. Ambassador Sabri Bachtobji, Permanent Representative of Tunisia to the United Nations Office in Geneva,

Ms. Ana Sandoval, eTrade for Women Advocate and Chief Operating Officer (COO) of Bold,

Ms. Shamika Sirimanne, Director, Division on Technology and Logistics at UNCTAD.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I'm very pleased to be part of this gathering today to share with you our experience on how Mauritania, my home country, has been developing a fast-track path to e-trade readiness.

The UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD), in collaboration with my department, the Ministry of Digital Transformation, Innovation, and Modernization of the Administration (MTNIMA), had conducted the e-trade Readiness Assessment of our country over the last 12 months. The international kickoff of these activities took place here in Geneva, as part of the eWeek organized by UNCTAD on December 6, 2023, and I personally oversaw the national launch of the activities in Nouakchott three weeks ago (on April 16th, 2024).

I would like to extend my gratitude to UNCTAD for compiling this rich assessment and to German Development Cooperation (GIZ) for their financial support.

As you may expect, our eTReady assessment covered the seven key e-trade pillars that are (i) strategies formulation, (ii) ICT infrastructure & services, (iii) trade logistics and facilities, (iv) payment solutions, (v) legal framework, (vi) e-trade skills development, and (vii) access to finance.

The eTReady assessment helped us identify the main challenges and priority measures that are necessary to overcome those potential difficulties.

For the purposes of clarity, I would like to articulate my remarks around the following two topics:

- Governance implementation approach, and
- Specific activities conducted for each of the seven assessment pillars.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I. First, on the Governance Implementation approach,

We have identified that we should:

- Maintain a focus on continuously developing local expertise and building capacity across all seven pillars,
- Leverage collaboration with all stakeholders and delegate leadership where it is most effective to achieve the intended objectives. This includes partnering with the Ministry of Higher Education for skills development, collaborating with the Central Bank to enhance digital payment systems, working with the Ministry of Finance to scale up trade facilitation and logistics, and engaging the Ministry of Commerce for strategy formulation and legal framework development, We are also working with the African Union Commission and other partners to ensure that we are ready for continental trade initiatives once they become reality.
- Emphasize agility in both the design and execution of development activities and prioritize small iterations for continuous learning and successful implementation.
- Implement proactive and continuous monitoring, focusing on measuring the right indicators using appropriate methods. We eagerly anticipate the upcoming UNCTAD "eTrade Reform Tracker" that will be shortly rolled out in partner countries and we would like to express our interests in participating in this initiative.

Ladies and gentlemen,

II. Second, on the Specific activities conducted on the seven assessment pillars:

Convinced of the vital importance of these pillars to create a conducive environment for the e-trade development, we have already embarked on the outlined path.

Strategies formulation

Regarding strategy formulation, the central bank has just issued two strategies: one for financial inclusion and the other for national digital payments. We have published an advanced draft of our AI national strategy to complete the digital transformation agenda 2022-2025. The works on strategy formulation will first seek coherence with these strategies to fill any remaining gaps that are required to boost e-trade readiness. We are glad to pursue the works on this pillar with UNCTAD in partnership with German Development Cooperation GIZ.

ICT infrastructure & services

In the field of ICT infrastructure which represents the major challenge for our country due to its vast expanse, low population density, and remote rural localities, the provision of Internet services in these last mile areas is often unprofitable for private operators, leaving these populations unconnected. Faced with this reality, we have identified key Universal Access priorities that we are pursuing as of now and I am pleased to let you know that the latest government project in this regard, of up to USD 14 millions, will be completed this upcoming June (2024) and will connect **241** localities on the southern border with 4G services. Two similar initiatives have already been identified to provide 4G connectivity to border localities further east. This initiative is aimed to enhance security and digital inclusion for vulnerable populations, including women's cooperatives engaged in agriculture along the Senegal River Valley.

Regarding the resilience of our international connectivity we are finalizing a 25m USD contract to build our second and redundant submarine cable system. Moreover, studies are ongoing for a third cable, which will reinforce the resilience and perennity of our international connectivity.

For the development of the terrestrial backbone infrastructure, we, in partnership of the World Bank, have launched the WARDIP project with a budget allocation of over \$32 million towards the enhancement of the national backbone network alone. This \$61 million-funded WARDIP project has the dual aim to (i) develop the ICT infrastructure and (ii) harness digital technology to enhance youth employability and bolster the competitiveness of our economy. Additionally, we will also see the completion and certification of our first Tier III data center over the next few weeks. This data center, undertaken in collaboration with the European Investment Bank (EIB), is funded with \$8.3 million.

Furthermore, a cloud project is integrated in the WARDIP project with an allocated budget of \$3 million. We have also modernized our infrastructure with the latest hyper converged infra (HCI) platforms along with a major update on cyber

security solutions on both hardware and software sides prior to the effective start of operations of the newly created National Cybersecurity and Electronic Certification Agency created just last month (22 April 2024).

We are also considering satellite-based connectivity solutions that will provide ubiquitous connectivity across the country as part of our Universal Access strategy and talks are in an advanced phase with US based SpaceX's Starlink on the regulatory requirements to deliver the service where it is most needed in many parts of our vast territory.

Trade logistics and facilitation

The Ministry of Commerce and Customs in Ministry of finance have ongoing projects for a full digitalization of the customs processes. We are working on the integration of an end-to-end logistics capabilities in the postal services company as well as an advanced project of complete digital addressing systems in .

Payment solutions

The rising use of electronic wallets in the country since 2021 is further supported by a 3m USD to implement a national payment switch. The aforementioned National digital payment strategy has identified a rich set of activities to nurture the ecosystem and bring support to FinTech startups.

Legal framework

As acknowledged by eTReady report "In recent years, Mauritania has put in place the foundations of the digital legal and regulatory framework by adapting laws that govern electronic communications, cybercrime, the protection of personal data, electronic transactions and electronic means of payment."

We have an ongoing work with The United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) to ensure we have a coherent and conducive regulatory framework that is aligned with UN standards to support development of e-trade.

E-trade skills development

In terms of skills development, many initiatives are underway to promote innovation, digital education, raise awareness of the opportunities offered by digital

technology, as well as provide training in the digital fields that are demanded by Mauritanian market.

Access to finance and more generally supporting SMEs to innovate and thrive

We have recently acted into law the Startup Act that, as part of our overall strategy for the development of the digital economy and innovation, aims to define a legal and institutional incentive framework for the creation and development of startups in the country. We are also completing the design phase, with international partners, of the Innovation Hub that has the goal to strengthen institutional and individual innovation capacity, accelerate sustainable digital transformation and create new opportunities for stakeholders in the digital ecosystem with the aim of achieving an equitable digital future for all. Finally we are setting up a Innovation Fund as outlined in our Startup act Law to offer adapted financing mechanisms to our innovative startups.

For access to finance and the digital payment development, considered as the first challenge that prevents the development of startups and SMEs in the field of e-trade, several initiatives are currently under considerations by the competent entities.

Ladies and gentlemen,

While we have already made significant progress on all these fronts, I am fully conscious that the necessary reforms will take time. But I also know that my fellow citizens are ready and eagerly awaiting this ongoing digital transformation.

Moving forward, it will be important that Least Developed and developing countries are extended sufficient support from the International Community to achieve inclusive and sustainable outcomes from the digital transformation. Our discussions during the IGE will be important in that regard, including within the context of the Global Digital Compact.

I thank you for this opportunity and I look forward to further cooperation and partnership.