

# **Global Forum for National Trade Facilitation Committees 2022**

1st February 2022

## **Opening Session**

**Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Executive Secretary, UNESCAP**

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Distinguished participants,

Dear colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to join my colleagues from UNCTAD, WCO, ECE, and others to open the Global Forum 2022 for National Trade Facilitation Committees.

With the recurring disruptions from the COVID-19 pandemic, accelerating the implementation of trade facilitation reforms is more crucial than ever to ensure trade can play its role as a key means of implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Efficient and transparent trade procedures are also essential for making trade more inclusive, as well as to minimize the negative impacts transportation of goods across borders can have on the environment.

In this time of pandemic, public and private sector need to work together to ensure essential supplies such as medicines and vaccines reach their destinations in a timely manner. Coordination among the many stakeholders involved is crucial, and this makes National Trade Facilitation Committees, and this Forum, particularly relevant.

As you are aware, ESCAP, together with other UN regional commissions, conducts a Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation every two years. We are pleased to launch the global report summarizing the results of the 2021 Survey during this Forum. The results are encouraging. Countries across the globe have continued to make progress on implementing trade facilitation measures during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially on digitalizing international trade formalities.

However, challenges persist. Despite significant progress over the past 2 years, implementation of cross-border paperless trade is still low. It is estimated that full digital trade facilitation implementation could cut the average trade cost by more than 13%, seven percentage points more than can be expected from simply achieving compliance with the WTO TFA measures. Strong political will and more intergovernmental cooperation are needed to make further progress on trade digitalization, as an important element of countries' digital transformation efforts.

The joint UN Regional Commissions report also highlights the lack of implementation of sustainable trade facilitation measures, with few countries taking into account the specific trade facilitation needs of small and medium-sized enterprises and women in business. To address this, ESCAP is spearheading the development of an online course on Next-Generation Trade Facilitation, specifically focusing on trade facilitation measures for SMEs, women, as well as for the agricultural sector. I hope these measures will become a priority focus area for NTFCs in the future.

In collaboration with UNCTAD, we are also looking at how countries can reduce the impact of trade procedures and trade compliance mechanisms on climate change and the environment, with early work pointing again to trade digitalization as a way to reduce wastes and CO2 emissions from overly complex and paper-intensive formalities. We find that achieving paperless trade on a global scale would be equivalent to planting more than 1 billion trees.

Looking ahead, it will therefore be important to ensure that the progress made on trade digitalization and the acceptance of electronic documents during the crisis are secured, by strengthening legal frameworks and implementing long-term digital and sustainable trade facilitation plans, which will also help build resilience and enhance preparedness for future crises.

Countries should continue and sustain efforts to strengthen cooperation to adapt to the increasingly digital global economy while leaving no one behind. I encourage all leaders to take advantage of all available global and regional mechanisms to make progress, such as the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement and the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific, an enabling and forward-looking UN treaty that entered into force last year.

I would like to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to all our sister regional commissions for their collaboration on the global report, as well as to UNCTAD, ICC, ADB, ASEAN, OCO, CAREC, and so many other organizations and experts for the excellent cooperation during its preparation.

I look forward to continued partnership to make trade simpler, cheaper, more resilient, and sustainable.

Thank you.