

# Global Forum for National Trade Facilitation Committees 2022

1st February 2022

## Opening Remarks

**Mr. Philippe Isler, Director, Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation**

### Talking points

- Ladies and gentlemen, I am honoured to have the opportunity to say a few words at the start of this topical and timely forum. I wish to **thank our hosts, UNCTAD**, for the invitation and for bringing us here today to discuss the critical role of NTFCs and how to better work together through this vital trade facilitation mechanism.
- The title of this event is “Accelerating the implementation of trade facilitation reforms through NTFCs ***despite the pandemic situation***”. I would also add “**because of the pandemic situation**”. I say “because” for the reason that the pandemic has shown us that when there is no other choice, trade facilitation can happen.
- We need to **build on the momentum** of the last two very difficult years to solidify the gains made and continue to adopt a 21<sup>st</sup> century approach to border management.
- Trade facilitation is actually something that we can succeed in. With relatively little investment, we can see outsize results.
- I was reflecting that the last time I was up here (metaphorically speaking) was at the UNCTAD First African Forum for National Trade Facilitation Committees in November 2018. A lot has changed since then. But what I said then still holds true today: the potential of trade facilitation across the world remains enormous, contributing to economic development and poverty reduction.
- Just days shy of the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the entry into force of the World Trade Organization’s Trade Facilitation Agreement, it’s a perfect time to take stock of the status of its implementation and to ask ourselves : what are we doing right? What more should we be doing?
- We must not lose sight of the fact that NTFCs are **vehicles for accomplishing trade reforms**: plainly speaking, they are a means to an end. They were not intended to be bureaucratic, static bodies but rather dynamic and engaged vehicles that need to be revisited and reassessed.
- We have seen first-hand at the Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation **that our projects benefit from well-functioning NTFCs**: they set trade facilitation priorities, are a catalyst for reform, and coordinate initiatives. Importantly, they are also a platform for public-private discussion and

collaboration. We see the NTFCs as a key partner in our projects. In many of our projects, we have created permanent technical working groups anchored to the local NTFC to ensure the sustainability of our projects.

- As an initiative, we do not represent the private sector but we act as a catalyst to ensure the private sector is incorporated into the reform process. Without the private sector, there is no trade. It is essential therefore that it is actively represented within NTFCs. But just as importantly, it is essential that business recognises this opportunity and steps up to the challenge. To business representatives in the room, this is not a time to be passive, it is time to be part of the solution. There is a shared responsibility for trade facilitation reforms with obligations and with rewards, let's all act as partners in this regard.
- With each success, big and small, that we achieve toward realizing the TFA's full potential, it will bring new, far-reaching benefits . But the job is nowhere near finished. And to get there, both sectors must come together as allies to make this shared goal a reality.
- As part of our Alliance mission, we aim to remain practical, focused and result orientated in everything that we do. Our hope is that the discussions that will take place in the coming days will unfold in this spirit.
- Let's find pragmatic solutions, let's learn from each other and let's set ourselves realistic targets that we can achieve in a reasonable amount of time after this forum comes to a close.
- I look forward to the discussions and the ideas that will be generated during the next 4 days.
- Thank you