

Aid for eTrade Open Consultations, 21 April 2016

## Statement by Finland

Finland has been a strong promoter for ICT and innovation for development for a long time, and we strongly believe in the benefits that new technologies can bring to the development agenda. Since 2005, this has been an important part of our development policy and cooperation. Our current Government's development policy recognizes the critical role of technology as an enabler for sustainable economic development in developing countries. In addition, the private sector and gender issues are regarded highly important.

E-commerce is a very topical issue. The shape of global trade is changing. Companies and countries need to adapt in order to succeed in global competition. E-trade is part of still much broader digitalization of our economies and societies, and actually, the enabling factors of societal stability and development are a prerequisite for the development of e-commerce.

Although digital technologies have spread fast throughout the world in recent years, including developing countries, there are still enormous gaps remaining. Poorer developing countries face number of challenges in their efforts to move towards e-trade. ICT infrastructure and services are naturally essential for enabling e-trade. But infrastructure and equipment are not sufficient alone. ICT skills are also essential. ICT skills are needed when societies are being digitalized. We must have confidence and trust in the use of ICTs. Therefore, we must put effort into capacity building.

Besides infrastructure and skills, regulatory environment must be stable. Even the most innovative businesses benefit from regulation that gives them a predictable business environment. However, countries must not over-regulate growing and developing business sectors. All I mentioned before is best done through co-operation with all relevant stakeholders.

It is obvious that we need a comprehensive and holistic approach to tackle e-trade for development. It is important that this Aid for e-Trade initiative and its governance mechanisms are built in a way that they can adapt quickly and react to the changing reality, and changing demands and opportunities. A multistakeholder approach is key to this initiative with participation by the private sector and other civil society actors.

Finland has supported soon a decade the e-commerce work of UNCTAD, as well as, UNCTAD's Information Economy Report and UNCTAD's work on WSIS. We saw already years ago that e-trade is an important new area and where UNCTAD's team had innovative ideas. We are happy to see that this work has borne fruit and grown over the years. I wish to thank UNCTAD Secretariat for successful work and cooperation over the past years.