**Swedish Statement in the Committee on Trade Facilitation, 21 October 2021**

Honorable members and participants of this committee,

Let me start by thanking the EC for coordinating the interventions of some of the EU member states. As member of the EU, I would like to reiterate what has been mentioned by Sweden in previous years in this context, in that Sweden is a firm believer of multilateralism in general and that we contribute in various ways, methods, and channels to the implementation of the TFA in particular. The message in the TFAs article 21 is clear in that donor members agree to assist developing and least developing country members to implement the agreement and I am glad to inform the committee on some of the Swedish contributions.

To put the Swedish support into context, the Swedish Policy Framework for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Assistance recognizes free and fair trade including trade facilitation as an important part of this endeavour. Free and fair trade is a powerful tool for sustainable economic growth, development and poverty reduction. However, many people living in low and middle-income countries have limited capacity and possibility to utilize the potential that lies in trade – which is why aid for trade towards trade facilitation are key enablers to contribute to this.

In 2020, Sweden contributed approximately 420 million USD (3.7 billion Swedish Krona) to the international Aid for Trade agenda and supports partner countries in their efforts to use trade as a means for development. The aid for trade going towards trade facilitation in particular is currently mainly done at a regional level in Sub-Saharan Africa, and through multilateral partners such as the Enhanced Integrated Framework,the World Bank Umbrella Trust Fund for Trade and the International Trade Centre.

Trade facilitation is one of our prioritized areas and this includes addressing both the hard and soft constraints for effectively participating in trade. We would like to illustrate this by mentioning a long and fruitful collaboration with the World Customs Organization, which lies within our regional aid for trade support in Africa. In 2020, we signed a new agreement with the WCO on Customs Modernization in Sub-Saharan Africa for the period 2020-2022, approximately 4,2 million USD (37 million SEK). This is the third phase of collaboration with the WCO, which is a longstanding partner to Sweden in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Previous phases achieved some valuable results, such as accreditation of regional Authorised Economic Operators, IT connectivity and risk management, and the prevention of trade in endangered species. To give a very concrete example as a result of the previous phases, perishable imports have been going straight to store rather than being held up at the border, which resulted in reduced wastage rates and increased sales. This kind of concrete impact can make a difference for companies and people in the partner countries. From previous phases, the WCO has highlighted that lessons learned in order to implement TFA effectively include political will and commitment, private sector consultation and buy-in, the crucial role of National TF Committees, and ensuring that TFA considerations are fully integrated into national-level strategic and modernisation plans.

The focus in the new phase is on: 1) Boosted Trade Facilitation through modern and efficient customs procedures. IT-connectivity to automate, simplify and streamline border procedures and to harmonize border procedures with regional and continental free trade agreements; and 2) Customs reforms in terms of management, strategic planning, human resources and project management. This also includes the prevention of corruption, increasing the level of integrity, gender equality and environment and climate-related matters. Geographically, the new phase targets two regional economic communities: 5 of the 6 members of the EAC (Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi [not South Sudan]) and 7 members of SADC (Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe).[[1]](#footnote-1)

Sweden´s support to the World Bank is on roughly 20,3 million USD (175 million SEK) for the period 2017-2022, which includes the Trade Facilitation Support Program is another example. Earlier this year, the World Bank for instance completed research on trade facilitation challenges for women traders in the Pacific Islands and Timor-Leste. In particular, they found that the benefits of trade facilitation often impact men and women differently. More specifically, women-led businesses face greater challenges in that fewer women are represented in trade associations, fewer women are aware that customs allows pre-declaration of shipments prior to arrival and fewer women are aware that declarations can be submitted electronically. Evidence based research of this kind is key to get a good understanding of the challenges, bottlenecks and circumstances around trade facilitation and has led to a number of recommendations from the World Bank to improve trade facilitation policies to better address women trader’s needs. These recommendations include for instance improving access to and the quality of information on border related processes and procedures and strengthening the system for electronic payments, among others.

The Swedish International Development Cooperation’s focus on addressing the poorest also underlines our support to the Enhanced Integrated Framework as an entity dedicated to assisting LDCs in particular. As one of the major donors to the EIF with approximately 17 million USD (150 million SEK) for the period of 2017-2022 the EIF has been working in support of trade facilitation, including, for instance, the support to the reform of the Agency for the Promotion of Imports and Exports in Benin and a one-stop information centre for trade facilitation in Bhutan.

Let me conclude by mentioning how important a forum such as the Trade Facilitation Committee here at the WTO is vital for sharing experiences and for us to be able to assess the demand and needs from partner countries. and Sweden remains a committed partner in supporting developing countries in their efforts to integrate into the global economy.

Thank you for your attention.

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1. Tanzania is a member of both EAC and SADC. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)