Keynote Speech

OPENING SESSION: TRADE FOR PEACE: LEVERAGING CROSS-CUTTING COOPERATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

Dr. Jose Ramos Horta, Special Envoy of g7+
30 November 2020

Excellencies ladies and gentlemen. Good morning, good afternoon and good evening, depending on where you are. Amid this crisis of COVID-19 I pray that you all are safe and healthy.

Let me start by thanking WTO Accession Division for inviting me to speak at this very important event, the theme of which speaks to the aspiration of people in countries such as those of g7+ group. I would like to extend my gratitude to the g7+ WTO accession group members and ambassador Qurban Haqjo of Afghanistan as its coordinator for playing an important role in promoting the voice of conflict affected countries on international trade.

Excellencies ladies gentlemen!

Number of empirical studies have shown that trade is a conduit for peace among states and regions. Trade is a peaceful and hence a better alternative to military competition and war. The interdependence among Nations in terms of trade is believed to discourage interstate conflict. The manifold increase in volume of global trade over the past decades is reflection of this truth. With the increasing globalization of knowledge, economy, transportation and communication, the ease in doing trade is greatly enhanced. Regional integration and connectivity has unleashed the potential of countries for their prosperity and development.

However, we have also witnessed increasing economic and social gap between Nations. This is particularly true for countries that are mired in decades of conflicts; Young Nations such mine that witnessed 2 and half decades of occupation right after it was decolonized; countries such as south Sudan that has not been in peace since its independence; Counties such as Afghanistan that is a roundabout for regional development but has been in war for decades; Countries like DRC, beneath which lies trillions of dollars of untapped wealth, but has been among the poorest in the world. The list can go on. This applies to at least 20 members of g7+ countries let alone the 10s of other developing and least developed countries that are ranked fragile or LDCs. All of these countries which are at the bottom of “the bottom one billion” are bestowed with resources and potential that if unleashed cannot only make them self-reliant, but can contribute to the global prosperity.
If access to prosperity as promised by the liberal trade is true, then why are these countries deprived of its blessings? It is because they have been battleground for hegemonic contests rather than economic cooperation; it is because their inalienable right to prosperity has fallen prey to imperial greed.

The impact of increased global prosperity underpinned by international trade should spill into these poor countries in similar way, as does the rivalry between powerful giants disturbs their peace. The world’s poor countries provide raw materials that fuel the engine of global economy. Instead of getting resources in return to build our infrastructure and increased access to international market, our people are armed with weapons. Despite their geographical locations that are best suited for trade and cooperation, these countries have become breeding ground for conflict in the form of proxy wars, civil strife, extremism and terrorism.

The countries in post conflict situation with some degree of stability either lack the capacity to enhance trade or lack infrastructure to realize their potential and achieve economic growth. As an example, my own country Timor-Leste has sufficient reserves of oil and gas. But my nation has not been able to benefit from the return they deserve. We were only able to restore our maritime boundary with Australia just in 2019 where we managed through conciliation to restore our access to fair share. However, we have not yet been able to make sure that the exploitation of oil and gas becomes a sustainable means of employment for our citizens. Due to lack of needed capacity and infrastructure, the resultant of conflict, and hence fragility, we have not been able to refine the crude oil in our own territory that could grow our economy.

Excellencies ladies and gentlemen,

Much of what I said, is sad news and is just a glimpse of challenges faced by most of our member countries. I will spare the rest of my speech to proposals that can serve as food for thought for global prosperity.

The World Trade Organization together with its mission gives us a hope. By promoting liberal trade it ensures us that no country will be left behind. I am particularly encouraged by increasing accession of countries to WTO such as those in the g7+. The g7+ WTO accession group is in particular a promising platform that secures the space for conflict-affected countries to raise their voice. Given the fact that we are lagging behind in realizing the ambition of WTO, I would like to leave you with 3 pints summarizing our aspiration.

First: The current trade war has no winner at all. However big and powerful its dyads are, all of them are losing and will lose. In addition, any type of war among the big powers has direct consequences on the developing and least developed countries. We are already witnessing that the division among the giants has resulted in conflicts that are mostly fought in developing and least developed countries. Its economic and political consequences are even
direr on these countries. As we see that this rivalry among the most advanced countries has divided and polarized them so much that they have not been able to contain the spread of COVID-19 virus, a common enemy that knows no boundary, no race, no social and economic status. I am sure the pandemic is a test for us intended to fill this vide and division. But I hope that we realize this fact before it is too late.

Second: The increasing interconnectedness and globalization manifest that global peace and stability rests in peace and stability in conflict affected countries that are home to 1.5 billion people. Therefore, it is fair to say that pursuing peace, addressing conflict and supporting dialogue and reconciliation is becoming a moral duty of regional actors and hegemons. I will not frame it in a context of international relation that rests on realism because that very theory has contributed to polarization in the world today. The cause of peace is too noble to be measured with the yard of narrowly defined national interest. Peace and stability in conflict affected countries guarantee prosperity in regions. These countries need to be given the chance to play their fair share in world’s trade. Only then we can achieve what we call shared prosperity.

Third and last: Fragile and conflict affected countries are among the farthest left behind. In other words, the world is deprived of the share these countries could play in global trade and prosperity. These countries are at a critical juncture of their transition. The COVID-19 pandemic coupled by the polarization in global politics, has disproportionately affected them and has threatened the very peace in these counties. Therefore, we make a plea to the developed world to assist these countries and save them from relapsing into conflict. In line with the g7+ joint statement that was issued in May this year, I would like to reiterate the need for global ceasefire, assistance to make these countries self-reliance particularly through writing off debts and enhancing foreign aid and cooperation. In addition, we need to reform the international trade policies that can ensure a fair share to the least developed and poor countries.

Excellencies ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to conclude by reminding us that WTO was established on the premises that through fair rules of game, we want to promote economic development and peaceful relationship among nations. Never before has this ambition been more critical than it is today. We can only realize this noble cause, when believe with our actions in the principle of equality and fairness.

Thank you for the opportunity and I wish you all effective deliberations throughout the week.