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**Statement by the Ms Dorothy Tembo,
Deputy Executive Director, International
Trade Centre, made at the opening
ceremony of the 142nd Session of the
Council**

Michael Wheeler, Chair of the International Coffee Council,
Honourable Minister of Trade of Cameroon, Honourable Minister Atangana,
Ambassador Ivo Germann, on behalf of the Swiss government,

My dear sister, Vanúsia,

My other sister, Tanuja, from the other part of my parent organization,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

A very warm good afternoon to you all.

I am very, very honoured to represent the International Trade Centre at this important International Coffee Council to share reflections on what recent developments in the coffee sector really mean for the SMEs that we serve.

And a lot of it has already been spoken to but, as a matter of emphasis, I will also try to go through a few points.

What is particularly fitting is the fact that we are here meeting in Switzerland, a country through which so much of the world's coffee trade passes, and one which continues to demonstrate leadership in its contributions towards making the sector more sustainable and more inclusive.

At ITC, we work across the coffee ecosystem so to help the sector realize its full potential as one of the drivers for sustainable development.

We are fortunate to share a close and longstanding relationship with the ICO and its Member governments, with a rich track record of collaboration on issues ranging from circular economy and competitiveness to sustainability, value chain development and value addition.

Based on our experiences, I wanted to specifically highlight three areas that we see as being critical from our side.

First, the impacts of the green transition, and the opportunities in lowering the sector's carbon footprint.

Second, the urgency of building greater supply chain resilience, which starts with improving the resilience and competitiveness of businesses at all segments of the value chain.

And third, the importance of ensuring that the coffee sector is inclusive, especially as we look to the sector's next frontier, in areas such as digitalization, circular economy, and regenerative agriculture.

Let me begin with the green transition.

Climate change, deforestation and biodiversity loss are among the pressing ecological challenges facing the coffee sector, but there is also real momentum for change.

Certification under sustainability standards is growing, and governments are increasingly introducing trade-related environmental regulations to address sustainability concerns across global supply chains.

Their environmental objectives are important. And there is a strong business case for the transition to greater sustainability: higher incomes, better livelihoods, and clear demand from consumers and buyers. Low-carbon coffee is one example where we see this in action.

But these regulations and standards can also create significant burdens for smaller producers, who may need support to demonstrate compliance and adapt their production processes.

New digital technologies can help in this regard, particularly by strengthening supply chain traceability and making it easier for producers to collect, to manage and to share the information needed. At the end of the day, sustainability goes hand in hand with competitiveness.

Governments, standard-setting bodies, and other ecosystem players must therefore also discuss how best to achieve environmental objectives without inadvertently affecting SMEs' ability to remain part of the supply chains.

This brings me to my second point.

Global supply chains in recent years have experienced major disruptions, as we have just heard. Cuts to development aid have only added to the pressure.

This poses significant threats to the coffee sector's role as a driver of trade growth, with real and urgent implications for the 12.5 million farming households that rely on coffee for their livelihoods.

We must scale up efforts to help the smallholder farmers and other SMEs in the sector retain and create value; diversify to new export markets; meet the quality requirements of those markets; and access real-time intelligence on where export opportunities lie.

ITC's value chain development works across Africa, Latin America, the Pacific, and the Caribbean are actually focused precisely in this area, with a view to achieving the reduction of these challenges that are pertinent in many of these countries. We are working closely with other partners at the national, regional and international level, including the ICO, the Inter-African Coffee Organization, and the European Coffee Federation.

We also have forged strong relationships across the private sector, with the goal of leveraging investment in possible sustainable ways.

We are already seeing positive outcomes of these efforts and I just wanted to share with you a little bit of that.

Between 2022 and 2025, over 16,000 coffee-producing SMEs have improved their competitiveness through ITC projects, leading to \$62.9 million in sales.

And together with the ICO and the Specialty Coffee Association, our new course on accessing specialty coffee markets is set to meet over half a million users.

And, finally, we must also ensure that we keep inclusion front and centre, and work together to rid the coffee sector of any form of social harm.

We are seeing promising steps in this direction, but there is more that can be done and we must work towards doing that. We cannot afford to look at only the sector's economic dimension; we must also address its environmental and social dimensions.

That is why we have in place a project known as CLEAR, devoted to tackling the root causes of child labour in coffee supply chains, working alongside ICO, ILO, FAO and UNICEF, and with the kind support of the European Union.

There is more I could share, but certainly time does not permit me at this point.

But I wanted to end by saying this: none of the challenges that the coffee sector faces can be resolved by a single entity.

We must therefore continue and consolidate our efforts in working together. We must work proactively to ensure that the coffee sector remains a powerful force for improving livelihoods, delivering on sustainable development, and changing lives for the better. Because that is our ultimate objective.

Let me end by thanking all those partners that make our work possible. I wanted to recognize the support that we have been receiving over a long period from SECO, which we are very

appreciative of; from KOICA, Korea; from the UK; and from Spain. As I said before, from the EU as well.

Thank you very much and wishing all of you very successful deliberations as we proceed with the meeting. Thank you.