**Opening Remarks**

**National Capacity Building Workshop “Strengthening Digitization and Entrepreneurship Skills among Micro-, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs) for Accelerating Progress towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Ethiopia”**

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26 February 2024

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Mr. Hassan Mohammed, State Minister, Ministry of Industry,

Mr. Ramiz Alakbarov, United Nations’ Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Ethiopia,

Distinguished delegates,

Representatives of the MSME sector in Ethiopia,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to join you today at the national capacity building workshop on “Strengthening Digitization and Entrepreneurship Skills among Micro-, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs) for Accelerating Progress towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Ethiopia”.

First of all, I would like to start by thanking the State Minister and senior officials from the Ministry of Industry, as well as the United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator Ethiopia. Your presence demonstrates the high-level commitment to the critical issue of strengthening digitization and entrepreneurship skills among micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) for accelerating progress towards achieving Sustainable Development Goals. Second, I would like to thank the participating national and local policymakers as well as MSME entrepreneurs in this workshop. I encourage and expect your active engagement and insightful discussions over the next four days. Through your active participation, I believe you will enhance your skills and knowledge that will support the growth and resilience of MSMEs, especially when the world is grappling with simultaneous challenges that have impacted MSMEs to run businesses efficiently.

Ladies and gentlemen, MSMEs play crucial roles in accelerating progress towards SDGs in line with national needs and circumstances in Ethiopia. Nonetheless, MSMEs in developing countries, especially those owned by women and youth, have been hit the hardest by the negative socioeconomic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Global Sustainable Development Report 2023 has informed that MSMEs in developing countries, including in Ethiopia, have not bounced back as rapidly as their counterparts in developed countries. Challenges facing MSMEs in developing countries are not only affecting job creation and inequalities, but also jeopardizing the hard-won progress towards SDGs. Investing in MSMEs and facilitating MSME access to digital solutions are prioritized targets of in the Doha Programme of Action for Least Developed Countries 2022-2031. Supporting MSMEs is included in Secretary-General’s report on Our Common Agenda, as a critical means to build a fair and resilient global economy that works for all.

Ladies and gentlemen, the reason why Mr. State Minister, his team and my colleagues decided to come and be with you this week is because both the Government of Ethiopia and the United Nations believe in what you do. The small enterprises that you run are strong engines for accelerating progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, especially goals relating to creating jobs, eradicating poverty and hunger, reducing inequalities and enhancing shared prosperity. You are all witnesses to the power of MSMEs not only as job creators, but also as incubators for entrepreneurship and innovations. It is therefore important that the Government of Ethiopia and its development partners that include the United Nations system have joined hands and are actively supporting MSMEs. This support will not only strengthen MSME capacities, but also ensure MSMEs contribute to digital connectivity and job creation, as key transitions with catalytic effects across Sustainable Development Goals.

Despite their important roles, MSMEs are vulnerable to economic shocks and uncertainties. Even before the pandemic, MSMEs are often left with few avenues to access to affordable credit and market opportunities. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated pre-existing challenges and further threatened to overwhelm MSMEs’ coping capacities. Compared to large and formalized enterprises, MSMEs are less able to formulate business plans in preparation for uncertainties. Likewise, they suffer from limited access to economic stimulus packages launched during times of crisis.

Ladies and gentlemen, the efforts to accelerate progress towards SDGs requires not only sustained policy support. It also calls for concrete measures that strengthen MSME capacities, especially in the era of digital economy. I am therefore glad that you all took time from your offices and businesses to spend some time with the professional trainer team from the Fetun Management P.L.C, who is recommended by the Ministry of Industry. I am sure they will do a good job to impart cutting-edge skills that will help you become master trainers, sharing your knowledge learnt with MSMEs in your communities, optimizing MSME operation efficiency and expanding their access to financing and market opportunities.

At this moment, I would like to sincerely thank the support of the Ministry of Industry, the United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator Office and the United Nations Country Team in Ethiopia for supporting the project on “Strengthening national capacities for enhancing MSME resilience and building forward better to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in developing countries”, under which the Division for Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs is the lead implementing entity. With funding support from the United Nations Development Account and the United Nations Peace and Development Fund, this project has been implemented in Ethiopia together with eight other developing countries in Africa and Asia, from 2022. Together with the Ministry of Industry and the United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator’s Office, we look forward to achieving impactful results from this project, in close alignment with priorities identified in the Ethiopia – United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (2020-2025).

Ladies and gentlemen, although this capacity building workshop takes place in four days, I believe the learning journey you have embarked on will help you realize your full potential. We expect each one of you to share the knowledge and skills you have learned in Addis Ababa within your respective communities and states. You all constitute crucial building blocks for enhancing MSME resilience and elevating MSME contributions to the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels.

I thank you for your attention and wish the workshop the best success.

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