11 March 2026

To: World Trade Organization Member Delegations

RE: ***Initiative for a Digital Africa Calls for Making the E-commerce Moratorium and the E-Commerce Work Programme Permanent***

The Initiative for a Digital Africa (IDA) is a network of organisations committed to supporting prosperity, economic growth, and job creation across Africa by promoting the adoption of robust digital policies.[1]

At the upcoming 14th Ministerial Conference (MC14) of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in Yaoundé, Cameroon, you and other representatives will have the opportunity to promote Africa's digital economy competitiveness through empowering innovators and entrepreneurs seeking to bring their digital innovations to new markets by supporting the permanence of the long-standing Moratorium on Customs Duties on Electronic Transmissions in conjunction with the associated Work Programme on Electronic Commerce.

As described in the attached IDA Call to Action, the Moratorium and Work Programme protect Africa's digital growth pathway. We urge you to support a joint permanent extension of the Moratorium and the Work Programme at MC14.

Sincerely,

Initiative for a Digital Africa

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[1] The Initiative for a Digital Africa (www.initiativedigitalafrica.org) is a global network of organisations committed to supporting prosperity, economic growth, and job creation across Africa by promoting the adoption of robust digital policies. IDA's members include: ACT – The App Association, Africa Data Centres Association, Africa Information and Communications Technologies Alliance, Business Software Alliance, Computer and Communications Industry Association, Coalition of Services Industries, Information and Communication Technology Association of Malawi, Institute of Information and Communication Technology Professionals Ghana, Lesotho Information and Communication Technology Association, South Africa Information and Communication Technology Association, and TICON Africa. To learn more, please visit: https://initiativedigitalafrica.org/.

Initiative for a Digital Africa Calls for Permanent Extension of the E-commerce Moratorium and Work Programme

In place since 1998, the Moratorium on Customs Duties on Electronic Transmissions (Moratorium) and the associated Work Programme on Electronic Commerce (Work Programme) have become a pillar of the Internet economy, enabling businesses – especially micro-, small-, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) – to grow and compete in the digital economy no matter where in the world they are physically located. The Moratorium advances this goal by keeping the Internet free from tariffs or other customs formalities. The Work Programme does so by providing a forum to address "trade-related issues relating to global electronic commerce, taking into account the economic, financial, and development needs of developing countries" with a focus on "addressing the digital divide, including for MSMEs."

The promise of more inclusive digitalisation across Africa and other economies is significant. According to the African Development Bank's Ten-Year Strategy: 2024-2033:

> Digitalisation has already revolutionised African lives. Around 4 in every 5 Africans own a mobile phone, around half of which are connected to the internet, and these figures are rising rapidly. Mobile technology platforms have given millions of people access to financial services. In agriculture, mobile agri-tech platforms have linked farmers to consumers, increased access to inputs such as fertiliser, and improved the flow of information on prices. New and more productive IT-enabled services are taking root across the continent. As early adopters of new technologies, Africa's young people will be at the forefront of these global changes. It is a top priority to equip African youth with the education, technical skills, and entrepreneurial knowhow they will need to take advantage of these opportunities, and to succeed in the labour markets of the future

The current international policy environment creates both risks and opportunities. According to *Digital Trade for Development* – a joint publication by the WTO, World Bank, United Nations, International Monetary Fund, and OECD:

> [H]igh trade costs have significantly hindered the participation of LDCs in trade, including digitally ordered and digitally delivered trade. ... [However,] certain African economies have been performing well in digitally delivered services..., outperform[ing] the rest of the world for several years. In a simulation using the WTO Global Trade Model, an enhanced use of digital technologies in Africa could lead to a potential increase of over US$ 70 billion in digital services exports between 2023 and 2040.

At MC14, the WTO membership will play an important role in determining the path forward. Renewal of the Moratorium and Work Programme will increase the global promise of digital trade and transformation. Conversely, non-renewal is likely to worsen regulatory fragmentation. The risks of WTO Members' imposing customs duties on electronic transmissions are captured in the World Bank's 2025 Digital Trade Regulatory Readiness initiative:

If countries develop isolated digital trade frameworks, this could lead to marginalization of certain economies and the formation of suboptimal regulatory blocs that hinder seamless cross-border digital transactions. To avoid this, fostering international regulatory cooperation is essential. Alignment with global best practices—through multilateral agreements (e.g., WTO e-commerce negotiations), regional initiatives, or bilateral dialogues—can help ensure a cohesive and inclusive digital trade ecosystem. Such coordination is crucial in preventing trade inefficiencies, reducing compliance burdens, and enabling all economies to fully benefit from the digital economy.

The Moratorium provides regulatory certainty that lowers transaction costs, reduces trade friction, and enables MSMEs and entrepreneurs to scale across borders. The Work Programme complements the Moratorium by serving as a valuable forum for digital trade discussions, especially for developing countries. In short, these initiatives help talent-rich but capital-constrained MSMEs and entrepreneurs to reach global markets without heavy infrastructure, while supporting home-grown solutions in AI, education, fintech, health, and the creative industries, among others.

We urge all WTO members to support maintaining the close link between the Moratorium and Work Programme and making them both permanent at MC14.

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