

Regional Policy Forum

on

Trade Facilitation and SMEs in Times of Crisis

20-22 May 2009

Beijing, China

Opening Remarks, John S. Wilson, Lead Economist, Development Research Group, World Bank.

It is a pleasure to welcome you, on behalf of the World Bank Group, to the Forum here in Beijing. I am very happy to be back in Beijing again, and all of us at the Bank are looking forward to the next several days discussions with all of you on a set of extremely timely and important issues in trade

I want to thank UNESCAP, especially Yann Duval and his colleagues, and our hosts here in China – CCPIT, and also recognize our World Bank colleagues based here in Beijing, and Yue Li of the Bank especially for her dedication and outstanding work to make this event happen.

We are particularly pleased to have the opportunity to have so many countries represented here from Asia to discuss trade facilitation at a critical time for the region and world.

The World Bank is forecasting that GDP growth in developing East Asia will slow to 5.3% in 2009. There has also been a rapid decline in world trade – projected for 2009 to be the sharpest drop in 80 years. China relies to a great extent on exports to global markets that are contracting. China's exports were down 21% the first two months of 2009 on a year on year basis.

There is a strong response, however, to these developments.

I have often given talks over the past year since the start of the global economic crisis by stressing that out of crisis comes opportunity – We have, I think, a great **opportunity** for all of us collectively to find new solutions to problems and obstacles to development and poverty alleviation that are centered in progress in the trade facilitation agenda.

There has been significant progress over the past two decades, especially in East Asia, in economic growth and moving people out of poverty. The percentage of the population living on less than \$1.25 has declined significantly since to below 20% in East Asia and about 50% in South Asia– through expanding trade. More than half of all trade occurs within the EAP region and supply chains are global now.

Reform to lower trade costs through the specific issues we will address over the next three days presents one of the strongest paths to economic recovery, I believe.

Regulatory reform, expanded access to information technology and communications, targeted investments to upgrade infrastructure that can expand exports and imports, and other steps are even more important today than they have ever been.

I won't go over the steps that the Bank has taken and is prepared to take to assist in country and regional reform in trade facilitation – we have a roundtable on Friday at the Bank office here when myself and colleagues will outline these.

Let me say now, however, that we are dedicated to assisting in any way we can in research and analytical tools, concrete operations in leading and technical assistance, and other measures along with you to ensure progress ahead.

We view these next 3 days of discussion as an important part of building a dialogue on the concrete agenda moving forward for us, and again, let me stress our great interest and pleasure in being with all of you.

Wednesday, 20 May 2009

08:30-09:00 **Registration**

09:00-09:30 **Opening Session**

Chair: *Mr. Diao Mingsheng, Permanent Representative of China to ESCAP*

- *Mr. Yu Ping, Vice Chairman, China Council for the Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT)*
- *Mr. Ravi Ratnayake, Director, Trade and Investment Division, ESCAP*
- *Mr. John S. Wilson, Lead Economist, Development Research Group, World Bank*