

**Statement by Mrs. Hala Zarrok**  
**Founder of the event management company “Mariage”, from Libya**  
**Delivered at the 52nd Joint Advisory Group (JAG)**  
**Meeting of the International Trade Centre held at the**  
**World Trade Organization, Room S1**  
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In the name of God,

Madame la Directrice du Centre de Commerce International,

Vos Excellences,

Mesdames et Messieurs les délégués,

Je voudrais exprimer ma gratitude et mes remerciements à la présidente de la 52ème session du groupe consultatif commun, Madame Arancha González, de son invitation. Merci de m’avoir donné l’opportunité pour parler au nom des entrepreneurs libyens devant vous aujourd’hui pour partager mes expériences en tant qu’entrepreneuse libyenne.

Permettez-moi de procéder en arabe.

I come from Libya, a country brimming with wealth and potential. It has passed through many civilizations throughout its history, making it home to many historical and archeological sites that attest to the history of these nations and civilizations. This confirms the value, uniqueness and richness of its land and its strategic geographical position in the middle of the world, with the longest coastal strip on the Mediterranean Sea in Africa as well as its vast area which amounts to one million, eight hundred thousand square kilometers and a population of about six million people, which is relatively low compared to its area. In addition, Libya has several environments, the coastal region, the mountain region as well as the desert. Libya is therefore a fertile ground for a prosperous and diversified economy, supported by a strong private sector and public sector and the welfare of its citizens. The truth however is unfortunately far from that.

Mounting economic problems in Libya have brought economic activity to paralysis, especially with the Libyan economy’s heavy dependence on oil for decades, accounting for more than 80 percent of the government's revenues. The combination of the international decline in oil prices and the significant decline in Libya's production in recent years since the events in 2011, in addition to other factors, the most important of which is the devaluation of the dinar and the liquidity crisis, have had a great impact on the decreasing living standards of the largest segment of the population and have become a burden to the state. Livelihoods and salaries were linked to the public treasury or through public sector companies which did not succeed economically according to known economic criteria. All of these reasons have had a negative impact on the labor market. This is evident in the spread of unemployment among young people, especially graduates. The unemployment rate jumped from 13% to

19%, which has led to a rise in emigration – despite it previously being non-existent in Libya – in search of work, despite the great potential of the state and the urgent need for construction and reconstruction and to meet people's physical, psychological and cultural needs. These factors have prompted more youth and women to start their own businesses and move away from their dependence on the public sector. As they say, "Need is the mother of invention", and this is true for Libya. Now more than ever, young Libyans males and females, have an incentive to create and innovate.

According to the OECD, the private sector accounts for only 5% of Libya's GDP. This is an indication of the real need to strengthen and support MSMEs in Libya. Projects encouraging private sector development will not only have a direct effect on beneficiaries' capacities and job creation but will also have an indirect effect on the diversification of Libya's economy and hence its sustainability and long-term development as it gradually shifts from a predominant public sector to a thriving private sector.

As a Libyan female entrepreneur in the field of organization and management of events, my success and expertise were entirely dependent on my intuition, expectations and by learning through trial and error because I did not have an economic or scientific foundation, nor supporting institutions to help me as I set up my business. I faced difficulties accessing information online because of the lack of their availability in Arabic and I had to search in other languages.

Therefore, because of my experience and based on the data that I have mentioned, I believe The Libyan Online Business School project that is funded by the EU and is currently developed by the International Trade Centre in partnership with Expertise France is not only welcome but also necessary. It will enable young entrepreneurs to easily access relevant information that is specifically tailored to the Libyan context, and to learn from experts and other entrepreneurs' experiences how to start a successful business, from the initial stages of idea creation and design thinking to finally establishing a business and scaling it. The fact that it is online makes it more so effective given the long distance between cities as well as unstable security situation, thus allowing more people to access the service and benefit from it. By enabling lecture downloads, the project overcomes the issue of frequent power cuts and allows students to study in their own time and according to their relevant circumstances. In the 2016 pilot project, 1074 participants were enrolled and 303 of them were certified. The positive response to the pilot led to the extension and enlargement of the program, in order to provide aspiring Libyan entrepreneurs with more substantial educational resources, including training, information, and other forms of assistance which would make a concrete difference in the ability of young entrepreneurs to establish and operate small enterprises. This tailored and complete project will hence inspire and encourage youth to improve the country's economy by launching their own projects, where in spite of the many problems and crises experienced by Libya today, the bright and positive side is the opportunities that they provide for the projects and innovative solutions that will overcome them.

I would like to end my word by thanking you once again for giving me the opportunity to represent Libyan entrepreneurs, young and old, females and males and to stress that support from the international community continues to be greatly needed in Libya's transitional phase.