

WORLD BUSINESS PRIORITIES FOR THE WTO AGENDA: MC11 AND BEYOND

Statement issued at the conclusion of the MC11 Business Forum

Tuesday, 12 December 2017

Representatives of the global business community were honored to participate in the first Business Forum to be held alongside a World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial Conference on 12th December 2017 in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

We commend the Government of Argentina for hosting this inaugural Forum to identify opportunities to strengthen global trade and investment in support of inclusive growth and development.

This statement is issued at the conclusion of the Forum and following prior consultations with businesses and private-sector associations from across the world. On the basis of these discussions, we wish to convey the following recommendations to Members of the WTO attending its 11th Ministerial Conference (MC11) as regards the future direction of the world trade agenda:

Strengthening the role of the WTO in response to global challenges

1. Global business reaffirms its strong and unequivocal support for the multilateral trading system under the auspices of the WTO. We call on all governments to take action at MC11 and beyond to strengthen the WTO system with the aim of promoting shared economic prosperity, legal certainty and a level playing-field for international enterprise.
2. We acknowledge the significant gains already realized by progressive rounds of global trade integration. Trade openness, underpinned by the expansion of the multilateral trading system, has brought about higher productivity, greater competition, lower prices, and improved living standards. For consumers, open trade has led to wider choices and lower prices of many goods and services—benefiting in particular lower-income households who consume a disproportionately higher share of tradable goods and services.
3. We also emphasize the vital role that the multilateral trading system has played in lifting millions out of poverty around the world. Looking forward, business strongly supports the objectives of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted in 2015. We believe that the global trading system is a vital—and indeed central—tool to meet these universally adopted targets for people, planet and prosperity. Achieving the SDGs will require a pragmatic approach from WTO Members to turn the WTO’s long-standing Doha Development Agenda into a realizable “Sustainable Development Agenda”.
4. In this context, we urge WTO Members to work towards a progressive work programme for the WTO—several new ideas for which are set out in the paragraphs below. We also call on Members to revitalize existing multilateral and plurilateral negotiations on market access, environmental goods, services, and other areas.
5. At the same time, we underscore the vital importance of securing and upholding existing WTO agreements and commitments. Protectionism is not a path to progress and we urge WTO Members to agree on a standstill and rollback of trade distorting measures in contravention of multilateral disciplines.
6. The WTO dispute settlement function has proven to be a powerful tool for enforcing rules regarding tariffs and other conventional trade measures, as well as those regarding subsidies and other “behind-the-border” measures that can distort trade. Sustaining the dispute settlement system—and further recognizing the value of WTO transparency measures—is, we believe, more important than ever.

7. We also acknowledge the importance of continued and expeditious implementation of the WTO's landmark Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA). Global business stands ready to support the implementation of the TFA, including through engagement in innovative public-private partnerships such as the Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation—launched at the WTO's 10th Ministerial Conference in 2015.

Establishing a new work programme for the WTO—priority issues

8. Our discussions have highlighted that recent years have witnessed remarkable developments in the digital economy, creating unprecedented opportunities for cross-border trade. The Internet is enabling micro, small and medium-sized businesses (MSMEs) to access global markets unlike ever before—with entrepreneurs in developing markets at the forefront of this exciting trend. But Internet-led changes to the composition, nature and speed of global trade are raising increasing policy frictions—limiting the development potential of technology-enabled commerce.
9. Global business believes that there is a unique opportunity for WTO Members to launch **new negotiations on e-commerce** to foster an open and trusted global ecosystem that better enables MSMEs to access global markets by leveraging new technologies. As a priority—and with the overarching aim of promoting inclusive trade—such negotiations should seek to enhance connectivity and capacity building in developing economies; simplify and expedite the clearance of small e-commerce shipments; and lower costs in destination markets for remote MSME traders.
10. We also call on WTO Members to adopt an **action plan on investment facilitation and to intensify multilateral investment policy coordination** in this vital area. The non-binding G20 Guiding Principles for Global Investment Policymaking include important elements to be considered in the course of such discussions.
11. In this context, global business stresses the importance of avoiding protectionism in cross-border investment; establishing open, nondiscriminatory, transparent and predictable conditions for investment; enhancing protection for investors and investments; promoting sustainable development; and encouraging responsible business conduct and corporate governance. If implemented on a global basis, such policies could help provide much-needed impetus to sustainable economic growth and job creation.
12. Business also considers that it would be timely for Members to agree on an **agenda for an MSME initiative within the WTO**, with a special focus on regulatory and transparency issues. An action plan for online training and trade courses for MSMEs to facilitate their participation in international trade should also be adopted.
13. We also note the importance of agreeing **new WTO disciplines on subsidies on fisheries and agriculture** in the near term. The successful conclusion of an agreement on illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing would represent concrete, collective action towards achieving SDG 14—and, moreover, provide positive momentum towards a more comprehensive agreement on fisheries subsidies.
14. With regard to agriculture, global business supports the efforts of WTO Members to **determine a landing zone for domestic support subsidies**—including a **permanent solution on public stockholding for food security purposes**, and enhancing transparency and reporting requirements on export restrictions.

Looking forward

15. The global business community stands ready to support WTO Members in their discussions at MC11 and beyond—and we remain committed to engaging in the WTO's Trade Dialogues process to this end. We firmly believe that strong and sound multilateral trade policies are vital to secure our common economic and societal objectives—and encourage all WTO Members to make the necessary commitments to enable trade as an engine of growth and prosperity for all.

Statement prepared by the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC)—the world's largest business organization—in consultation with global business networks and participants at the MC11 Business Forum.