

Paris, 23 November 2021

OPEN LETTER TO TRADE MINISTERS

Dear Ministers,

I am writing ahead of the World Trade Organization's Twelfth Ministerial Conference (MC12).

Every WTO ministerial conference matters to global business. As the end-users of the multilateral trading system, companies rely on WTO system to conduct the cross-border business so essential to creating peace, prosperity and opportunity for all.

This year's ministerial, however, matters more than ever. Solving the world's greatest challenges—the pandemic, climate change, poverty and inequality—requires the maintenance of open trade settings with a strong WTO at its centre. And yet despite a consensus on the need to reform the organisation to better serve the world, WTO Members have made very little progress over the past decade.

But we cannot wait forever. Today, the global business community is looking to you to demonstrate the leadership required to show that the WTO is fit for the twenty-first century. For many, that will require making hard compromises. But we urge you to always consider the bigger picture—that every nation benefits from a global system of negotiation, oversight and dispute settlement that actually works. And that making concessions on narrow interests to achieve a package deal will ultimately yield much higher returns for your country.

At MC12, there must be concrete outcomes in several key priority areas. Ministers should start a structured process on how to move ahead on WTO reform, finally conclude the agreement on fisheries subsidies, demonstrate support for the critically important Joint Statement Initiatives, make a positive contribution to ending the pandemic through measures that would genuinely speed the production and distribution of essential medical supplies, and establish a more systemic and ambitious program on environmental sustainability.

In our fast-changing world, WTO Members must support the development of the digital economy. We implore you to renew—or, better yet, make permanent—the moratorium on customs duties on electronic transactions. And we encourage all WTO Members become involved in the E-Commerce Joint Statement Initiative and aim for a high-standard outcome.

Beyond these headlines, I am pleased to attach more detailed recommendations in [Global Business Priorities for the WTO](#) that have been developed following extensive consultation process across our global network of 45 million businesses—over 65% of which come from developing countries.

As the principal business interlocutor at the WTO—and co-host of the MC12 Business Forum on 2 December—the International Chamber of Commerce stands ready to support you in making MC12 a success. No progress, however, would seriously undermine the credibility of the international trading system, and the relevance of the organisation to the key stakeholders.

Yours sincerely,



John W.H. Denton AO

Secretary General, International Chamber of Commerce