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**REPORTS ON RECENT IPU SPECIALIZED CONFERENCES AND MEETINGS**

**(h) ANNUAL 2011 SESSION OF THE PARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE ON THE WTO**

**Geneva, 21 and 22 March 2011**

1. The Parliamentary Conference on the World Trade Organization (WTO) is a unique tool for parliamentary scrutiny of international trade policies. The Conference serves as a de facto parliamentary dimension of this intergovernmental organization, enhancing its democratic transparency and accountability. It is a product of the collaborative efforts of the IPU and the European Parliament. The IPU input to the process is led by Senator D. Oliver, a member of the IPU Executive Committee and coordinator of the IPU delegation to the Conference Steering Committee.
2. The annual 2011 session of the Conference took place in Geneva on 21 and 22 March. For the first time in its eight-year history, the Conference was held on the premises of the WTO. The choice of venue was highly symbolic: at a time when the economic and financial crisis brought powerful new challenges to the global trading system, legislators specializing in questions of international trade gathered at WTO Headquarters to discuss ways of revitalizing the Doha Round and ensuring a more fair and equitable management of globalization through multilateral rules and disciplines enshrined by the WTO.
3. The session was attended by over 300 participants and observers from 62 countries and 11 international organizations, including 170 members of parliament. Also present were government representatives of 28 sovereign States that are Members of the WTO.
4. At the inaugural ceremony, addresses were made by Senator D. Oliver, Mr. S. Lambrinidis, Vice-President of the European Parliament, and Ambassador Y. Agah (Nigeria), current Chairman of the WTO General Council.
5. The session's programme included a series of lively thematic debates, panel discussions and keynote presentations. The exchanges between legislators and WTO negotiators dealt with a variety of themes, such as "Multilateralism in the midst of the rising tide of bilateral and regional trade pacts", "Rebalancing the rules of the multilateral trading system in favour of the poor", and "Trade and sustainable development: From collision to cohesion".
6. The hearing with the WTO Director-General, Mr. P. Lamy, was the highlight of the session, and was followed closely not only by parliamentarians, but also trade diplomats and the media. In his speech, the Director-General cautioned against the weakening of the

multilateral trading system. "In the current turbulent times", he said, "the WTO must act as a catalyst of trust and global unity through the conclusion of the Doha Round. A WTO in crisis is not what is expected of responsible members of the international community". Speaking of parliamentarians, he added: "We cannot conclude this Round without your explicit support".

7. This spirit of openness towards parliamentarians as elected representatives of the people was also characteristic of the interactive panel entitled "Dialogue with senior WTO negotiators". The four ambassadors who took part in the panel (Canada, Germany, Malaysia and the Philippines) are among the most experienced WTO negotiators possessing first-hand knowledge of the history and current state of play in the Doha Round talks. As the theme of the panel, the interlinkage between trade and sustainable development naturally gave rise to a lively debate.

8. The concluding panel of the session was somewhat different from other segments of the programme: its guest speakers were not WTO negotiators but journalists who write about the WTO and thus influence the way millions of people think about globalization and trade. Entitled "Connecting to society: Trade policy-making in the era of mass communication", the panel took the form of an informal exchange about common misconceptions and stereotypes regarding the WTO and international organizations in general. The ensuing interplay of ideas proved to be particularly rich because of the outspokenness of the panellists and the diversity of views represented in the debate.

9. At the closing sitting, the participants adopted by consensus an Outcome Document prepared by the Steering Committee and amended through a process of broad consultations with other participants (see *Annex*). The document encouraged WTO Members to show greater leadership and flexibility and make the necessary breakthroughs to enable a successful conclusion of the Doha Round by the end of 2011.

### **Recommendations**

10. Nearly 10 years after its launch and with no guaranteed end date in sight, the Doha Round of multilateral trade negotiations is at a critical juncture. To conclude the Round this year, WTO Members will need to show exceptional political will that is inconceivable without strong political support by parliaments. IPU Members are urged to provide effective oversight of their respective governments' participation in WTO negotiations and, as recommended in the Outcome Document of the annual 2011 session of the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO, use all the means at their disposal to convey to the governments the shared sense of urgency felt by the parliamentary community concerning the need to bring the Doha Round to a close by the end of 2011.

11. The fact that this year's session of the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO took place under the roof of the WTO is a major step along the way to endowing this intergovernmental organization with a meaningful parliamentary dimension. To build on this success and draw lessons for the future, the Conference Steering Committee is invited to undertake a stock-taking of the Conference activities since its inception eight years ago and share relevant conclusions with the Conference as a whole at its plenary session to be held in 2012.

# ANNUAL 2011 SESSION OF THE PARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE ON THE WTO

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*Organized jointly by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the European Parliament*

## OUTCOME DOCUMENT

*adopted by consensus on 22 March 2011*

1. We, parliamentarians assembled in Geneva for the annual session of the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO, welcome the signs of renewed energy and broader engagement by WTO Members in the negotiations on the Doha Development Agenda. The recently injected political momentum should be used to bring the Round to a successful, ambitious, comprehensive, fair and balanced conclusion that is consistent with its original mandate and builds on advances made so far. We encourage WTO Members to seize the narrow but real window of opportunity to conclude the Round by the end of 2011.

2. Convinced that multilateralism remains the best option to harness globalization and manage interdependence, we reaffirm our commitment to the universal, rules-based, open, non-discriminatory and fair multilateral trading system as embodied in the WTO.

3. International trade is a powerful engine of sustained economic growth and development and is required for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Against the background of a deep and widespread economic downturn, the multilateral trading system has proven its value. The very existence of WTO disciplines, rules and binding mechanisms played a crucial role in weathering the threat of protectionism and jumpstarting the economic recovery.

4. The needs and interests of developing countries, in particular the least developed countries, are at the heart of the Doha Development Agenda, which seeks to redress asymmetries and imbalances affecting them. Beyond greater market access opportunities, it is important for small and vulnerable economies, including the least developed countries, that special and differential treatment be made more effective, meaningful and operational across the negotiating areas and through greater policy flexibility and binding commitments on technical assistance and capacity building. We call upon developed countries that have not yet done so to provide immediate, predictable, duty-free and quota-free market access on a lasting basis for all products originating from the least developed countries. Developing economies that are advanced enough to do so, or declare themselves in a position to do so, should also contribute to this process.

5. The Doha Round is premised on the consensus that, to be concluded satisfactorily, the negotiations should advance in all domains under a single undertaking. Recognizing the paramount importance of progress in areas such as agriculture, non-agricultural market access, services, rules and trade facilitation, as well as the Dispute Settlement Understanding, we call on WTO Members to accelerate their work also on special and differential treatment provisions, the development-related mandate concerning the TRIPS Agreement, implementation-related issues and concerns, transfer and dissemination of technology, and access to knowledge for the benefit of developing countries.

6. We believe it is important to ensure that market opening and fair trade liberalization go hand in hand with sustainable development, which contains three pillars: economic development, environmental protection and social development. Drawing from the lessons of the financial and economic crisis, we also see the need for greater coherence between the different segments of global governance, including the WTO, the Bretton Woods institutions, the United Nations, ILO and other like-minded organizations. Sustainable global development policies are inconceivable without better coordination between these multilateral organizations, which share to a large extent the same objectives.

7. In order to make the WTO a truly universal organization, we underscore the requirement to facilitate the accession process for all developing countries, and in particular the least developed countries, while fully respecting the need for special and differential treatment. We call for the removal of political obstacles that stand in the way of ensuring the inclusiveness and universal character of WTO membership and for greater flexibility towards the least developed countries.

8. The protracted Doha Round negotiations have underscored a systemic need to improve the functioning of the WTO as a negotiating forum. It is necessary to rethink its processes and decision-making structures. We encourage WTO Members to give thorough consideration to relevant ideas and proposals, progressively forging a consensus on ways to do this. We are convinced that this should be done so as to strengthen the democratic character and legitimacy of the system, in particular for members with less economic power, and by devising a *modus operandi* that can reconcile efficiency and equity in negotiations.

9. We are convinced of the need for a strong and effective parliamentary dimension to the WTO and welcome the fact that, for the first time ever, an annual session of the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO takes place on the premises of this intergovernmental organization. Parliamentarians, as elected representatives of the people, have a duty to provide effective oversight of international trade negotiations, ensuring their transparency and fairness at the international and national levels. It is also their responsibility to remain vigilant so that the multilateral trading system contributes to sustainable development for all, taking fully into account the special and differential needs and capacities of developing countries, in particular the least developed countries.

10. The road to fairer and more equitable international trade starts with the conclusion of the Doha Round. We, as parliamentarians, therefore, call on all parties - both developed and developing countries - to show greater leadership and flexibility to make the necessary breakthroughs that will enable a successful outcome. We call on our parliamentary colleagues around the world to use all the means at their disposal to convey to their respective governments our shared sense of urgency concerning the present state of WTO negotiations. It is imperative to change gear, fuelling and sustaining the momentum in order to bring the negotiations to a close by the end of the current year.