
PARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE ON THE WTO

Geneva, 17-18 February 2003

Organised jointly by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the European Parliament

FINAL DECLARATION

adopted by consensus on 18 February 2003

1. We, parliamentarians, assembled in Geneva for the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO to discuss matters relating to multilateral trade, are convinced of the need for a parliamentary dimension of WTO. Our objective is to enhance the transparency and accountability of WTO activities.
2. We are committed to promoting further trade liberalisation which should take into account national development policies within an equitable rules-based trading system. The accession of new countries to the WTO is crucial to enable it to become a truly universal organisation. Our goal is to promote trade that benefits people everywhere, enhances development and reduces poverty.
3. We therefore laud the objectives that are set out in the Doha Development Agenda, which puts the concerns of the developing countries at the centre of the multilateral trading system and gives them pride of place in the present round of negotiations. We welcome the fact that the Doha mandate tackles developing country concerns about access to export markets. We applaud the stated intent to phase out agricultural export subsidies, and we acknowledge that the establishment of the Global Trust Fund, to which every developed country should contribute, will greatly increase the resources available for technical assistance in the area of implementation.
4. Nonetheless, the developments that have occurred since the Doha Ministerial Meeting give grounds for serious concern. Progress reported so far is not encouraging and negotiating deadlines set in Doha have come and gone without result. We regret that the deadlines on special and differential treatment for developing countries, and on making the TRIPS Agreement more flexible in order to improve access to medicines, have not been met. An alternative emergency solution for certain pandemics must be implemented.
5. Similarly we are worried at the lack of advances on the fundamental issue of enhancing real access to markets. It is crucial that agreement is reached on reducing barriers to trade in the field of agriculture, textiles and clothing. Agricultural support in wealthy countries, taken globally, is about four times the amount that is paid out in development assistance to the poor nations of the world. We consider that such trade distorting practices, and their social consequences are unacceptable.
6. We are wholeheartedly committed to raising these issues in our parliaments and engaging our respective trade negotiators in a dialogue and, at the same time, continuing our ongoing parliamentary process relating to the WTO, especially in the lead up to the next Ministerial Meeting in Cancun.

7. We do so because we believe that the days when foreign policy, and more specifically trade policy were the exclusive domain of the executive branch are over. International relations are shaping domestic policies, and external relations have become part of the domestic agenda. Without the introduction of substantive and procedural checks and balances similar to those that are usually applied to domestic policy-making, this tendency will inevitably cause a deficit in democracy at the international level. Real democratic participation is an important goal which has to be linked with the democratic transformation of the entire structure and content of global economic governance. The present initiative and subsequent work are the necessary foundations for this ultimate democratisation objective. We are thus acutely aware of the need for parliaments to participate in the running of public affairs that transcend national borders.

8. WTO is rapidly becoming more than a mere trade organisation. Unlike most international treaties, WTO agreements not only bind nations with regard to the definition of common objectives, but also provide for their enforcement through an effective dispute settlement mechanism. The WTO's decisions have a growing impact on services, utilities, intellectual property rights, government procurement, public health, education, employment, food safety and the environment, as well as the management of natural resources such as forests, fisheries and water.

9. The parliaments from the various nations of the world, as legitimate representatives of their populations, have played a pioneering role in the peaceful evolution of societies. A parliamentary interface is necessary to ensure a better representation of citizens in the multilateral negotiating process. Parliaments embody the sovereignty of the people and can, in all legitimacy, contribute to expressing the will of the people internationally. Their role is also to help citizens understand and cope with the challenges that globalisation poses to their daily lives, and incorporate their concerns into national and multilateral policy.

10. We therefore stress the importance of promoting the parliamentary dimension to the WTO. Building upon the progress and common understandings from previous meetings of the post-Doha Steering Committee, we are determined to push forward the inter-parliamentary process with the WTO which would evolve around regular parliamentary meetings held initially once a year and on the occasion of WTO Ministerial Conferences. We propose that these events be called Parliamentary Conferences on the WTO.

11. The objective of this exercise would be to oversee and promote the effectiveness of WTO activities; maintain dialogue with governmental negotiators and civil society; and facilitate information exchange, sharing of experiences and capacity-building for national parliaments in matters of international trade, in particular, concerning the WTO, and to exert influence on the direction of discussions within the WTO.

12. We call upon the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the European Parliament, as joint organisers of this meeting, to implement and work on agreed objectives adopted consensually by the post-Doha Steering Committee. We hope to meet at the forthcoming Ministerial Conference in Cancun to take stock of progress made.