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# ANNUAL SESSION OF THE PARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE ON THE WTO

Geneva, 1-2 December 2006

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

## **Presentation of the draft outcome document**

*by Mr. Geert Versnick, rapporteur*

Madam,  
Dear Colleagues,

The draft outcome document that I have the privilege to present to you is the result of a thorough preparation process, which started in September, when the Steering Committee had first debated it.

On the basis of that debate, I had presented a preliminary draft, which was sent to you all about a month ago. In all modesty, I am fully aware that each of you could have drafted a resolution that is as good and reflects even more your views. But my mission was to draft a resolution on which we can reach a consensus. We received a number of amendments from six delegations before the start of this Conference. The Steering Committee examined them last Thursday and presented a revised draft yesterday morning, to which you again had the opportunity to present amendments. In this second round, we received amendments from eight delegations, which the Steering Committee considered yesterday evening.

The Steering Committee has accepted a relatively small number of amendments, sometimes in a slightly different wording. There are two reasons why a number of amendments were not incorporated in the text: either because there was no consensus, and as you know, our Steering Committee decides by consensus, just like this Conference; or because it was felt that the proposed amendment (though interesting in itself) strayed from the main thrust of the declaration.

For instance, we received amendments from two delegations on the accession of new members of the WTO. All members of the Steering Committee agreed that this is an important issue. However, it is not part of the Doha Round of negotiations, and many members of the Committee felt that the focus of our declaration should be kept on that Round. So, we did not insert a paragraph on accession issues, all the more so because we have dealt with the issue in some of our previous declarations such as the Hong Kong one. And of course, we could again choose it as a theme for discussion at a future session. I have the feeling that the Steering Committee wants to take this up again either as a theme or a panel discussion.

There was also an important amendment establishing a link between what happens in the WTO and the achievement of such global objectives as full employment, sustainable development and the empowerment of women. We have tried to cover this by inserting a reference to the Millennium Development Goals at the beginning of paragraph 5 of the text.

This brings me to the content of the declaration I am presenting to you. As I already mentioned, the purpose of the text is to send a clear and strong message, from us, parliamentarians, to our governments and WTO negotiators, that the failure of the Doha Round is not an option, that negotiations must be resumed in earnest and that all major players must be prepared to make the necessary concessions to achieve a positive outcome for

everybody, but especially for developing countries. Our dialogue with ministers and WTO negotiators yesterday morning showed once again that all the parties are very good at telling each other what concessions they should make. Our declaration urges everybody to have a close look at their own responsibility. And there can be no doubt that in this Round, which is a development round, the main responsibility lies with the developed world.

If you want your message to be strong and clear, you need to stick to the essentials. That is why we have opted for a short declaration, leaving out all matters, however important, that would detract from the central message. Allow me to briefly go over the nine paragraphs of the text that is submitted for your approval.

In the first paragraph, we start off with a premise: the prospect of a real failure of the Doha Round.

I like the second paragraph of our text very much, which states unreservedly that we are committed to a multilateral approach to international trade problems, a multilateral approach embodied by the WTO.

In the third paragraph, we affirm that bilateral and regional agreements are not an alternative solution and that the multilateral approach constitutes, especially for the least developed countries (LDCs), the best guarantee of equitable treatment.

The fourth paragraph contains our core message which I just mentioned, and very importantly – calls on parliamentarians to resist neo-protectionist trends that are already in sight.

The fifth paragraph recalls that the Doha Round is centred on development and also sets out the measures to be taken, in any case, in favour of developing countries, particularly the LDCs, such as the "Aid for Trade" initiative.

The sixth paragraph warns against the risk of overstressing the WTO dispute settlement system if the Doha Round fails, whereas the seventh and eighth paragraphs deal with the issue of improving the working methods of the WTO itself, while stressing that decision making should continue to be carried out by consensus.

Finally, the ninth paragraph focuses on our role as parliamentarians in the area of international trade. Some of you may feel that we should have said more on this topic, since this is after all the outcome document of a parliamentary conference. However, we have analysed our own role at length in some of our previous resolutions and I believe we should not keep repeating ourselves. That is why the present text only reiterates the central idea, which is that international trade is too important to be left in the hands of governments alone and that we, parliamentarians, have a duty to oversee the work of our governments in the WTO.

In conclusion, Madam, dear colleagues, I believe that by adopting this resolution we will highlight three points to our governments, who are of course those who have to do the actual negotiating: first, that we, as parliamentarians, are capable of moving beyond our differences of opinion and of reaching a consensus on the principles that are the only possible basis for successfully concluding the Doha Round in the interest of all the citizens we represent, and especially of the 70 per cent of the world's peoples that continue to live in unacceptable circumstances. Second, we are of the opinion, as many speakers in yesterday's and today's debates have indicated, that the time to postpone, the time for fake manoeuvres and pseudo concessions is over. It is five minutes to midnight if we want to act and achieve results. Last but

not least, we believe there is sufficient support within parliaments to carry the undoubtedly difficult decisions that need to be taken, to ratify them and to explain and defend them vis-à-vis our electorate.

Finally, dear colleagues, let me leave you with a thought from the late U.S. President, J.F. Kennedy. In his acceptance speech, he spoke the inspired and historic words : "Do not ask what your country can do for you, but ask what you can do for your country".

This idea, although it was expressed several decades ago, remains very pertinent. I would like to send a similar message to all world leaders and especially to the governments of developed countries : "Do not ask what Doha can do for you, but ask what you can do for Doha".

I call on the Conference to adopt this draft outcome document by consensus.

Thank you.