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What future for the WTO?

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Geneva, 13 June 2016

Excellencies,
Honourable Members of Parliament,
Ladies and gentlemen,

- It is a privilege for me to have this opportunity to address the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO in my capacity as Chair of the WTO General Council. At WTO's Ministerial Conference in Nairobi in December last year, Ministers resolved to find the best way to move the negotiations and the agenda of the multilateral trading system forward. In the first half of this year, Members have embarked on a period of reflection on how to address these issues. Although we have not yet found a clear path, discussions are ongoing, and Members are actively engaging.
- As parliamentarians, you play a crucial role in connecting the WTO to your constituents, and your constituents, the citizens, are ultimately the main beneficiaries of what we do at the WTO. As you are aware, also since the agreement in several cases goes through parliament, at the Ministerial Conference in Bali in 2013, WTO Members adopted the Trade Facilitation Agreement. At the conference in Nairobi, we reached several decisions. The decision on export competition, which will lead to the elimination of export subsidies in agriculture is historic and a very important outcome in agriculture.
- You probably all know, that the process to reach agreements at the Ministerial Conference has been criticised. I believe there is a common understanding among Members that we have to take this seriously and seek to avoid repeating this by emphasizing the need for transparency and inclusiveness in our preparations for the next ministerial conference.
- As proven in Bali and Nairobi, if all Members work together and provide the requisite political will, consensus to agree on negotiating outcomes is possible at the WTO. Follow-up of these outcomes and of the Ministerial Declaration from Nairobi is now essential.
- The General Council continues to monitor the work that is taking place in the relevant WTO bodies to ensure the faithful implementation of all decisions. The entry into force of the TFA, the Trade Facilitation Agreement inches closer to the required two thirds of all 162 WTO Members as the WTO has already received more than 80 instruments of acceptance. The Preparatory Committee on Trade Facilitation continues to receive notifications of commitments and the TFA Facility stands ready to provide support for developing and least-developed country Members on TFA-related matters.
- One of the decisions in Nairobi mandated further negotiations in an accelerated timeframe, on a permanent solution on public stockholding for food security purposes. Another addressed a special safeguard mechanism for developing members, which is also under negotiation. The Committee on Agriculture in Special Session conducts the negotiations on these two issues.
- Some decisions on preferential treatment for LDCs were also adopted at MC10. On the Services Waiver, the Services Council has already received 23 notifications of preferences for LDC services and service suppliers. On rules of origin, the Committee on Rules of Origin will discuss ways to enhance transparency and monitor steps taken by preference-granting Members to implement their commitments.

- Evidently, more needs to be done. With the sluggish growth of the global economy, trade has to step up. In Nairobi, Ministers pledged to strengthen the multilateral trading system for it to provide a strong impetus to inclusive prosperity and welfare for all Members. They vowed to ensure that developing country Members, and especially the LDCs, secure a share in the growth of world trade commensurate with the needs of their economic development.
- Directions for further work were incorporated in the Nairobi Declaration:
 - To ensure efficiency in implementing the covered agreements, the General Council was tasked to consider the need for adjustments in the structure of the WTO subsidiary bodies.
 - To ensure that regional trade agreements, or RTAs, remain complementary to, and not a substitute for, the multilateral trading system, the WTO's Committee on Regional Trade Agreements was instructed to discuss the systemic implications of RTAs for the multilateral trading system and their relationship with WTO rules.
 - The Ministerial Conference also recognized the centrality of development in the WTO's work and that members shall continue to give priority to the concerns and interest of the LDCs.
 - Important differences in positions persist when it comes to the Doha Development Agenda and how to address the negotiations. Nevertheless, there remains a strong commitment of all Members to advance negotiations on the remaining Doha issues. Let me add that some Members wish to identify and discuss other non-Doha issues for negotiations, while others at this stage do not. Finding ways to continue to deliver meaningful outcomes in the WTO is thus no easy task, but Members continue to search for convergence.
- With MC11 only one and a half years away, our work in Geneva needs to intensify. But we need your help. I urge you to engage actively in discussions on how to strengthen the WTO and its negotiating function, support the process and help us to find a common way forward for the next ministerial and beyond. I have invited all Members to consult with me on the exact date and venue of the next Ministerial Conference.
- The work we do at the WTO is at the service of the Members. For the WTO to be responsive to the needs of Members, parliamentarians' inputs to our work with respective governments is helpful to provide a better understanding. Furthermore, as parliamentarians, you are asked to approve the results of negotiations in the WTO. Together, let us continue to develop a framework for global trade that is predictable, stable and transparent. Together let us continue to improve the multilateral trading system to address effectively Members' concerns and help improve the welfare of citizens.
- Thank you very much for your attention.