

# **Statement of Commerce & Industry Minister of India at the Informal WTO Ministerial Gathering at Davos on 24 January, 2020**

## **Introduction**

Federal Councillor, Mr. Guy Parmelin,  
DG WTO, Mr. Roberto Azevedo,  
Ministers, Excellencies and  
Distinguished Ladies & Gentlemen,

1. Let me begin by wishing all of you a very happy new year. First of all, I wish to thank the Swiss Government for hosting this informal Ministerial Gathering on WTO issues. I also thank DG WTO for his assessment of the state of play and prospects for MC12.

## **Appellate Body**

2. We believe that we must all work collectively to achieve the vision of the founding fathers for an effective multilateral trading system. Clearly, the restoration of the full strength of the Appellate Body will contribute to the realization of that objective.

## **WTO Reforms**

3. The agenda for WTO reforms should be balanced and inclusive, to address the historic asymmetries in the Uruguay Round Agreements. A good starting point for the reform agenda would be removing the imbalances in the Agreement on Agriculture and ensuring a level playing field, particularly for developing economies. As long-standing proponents of WTO reform, developing countries have sought the elimination of unequal and trade-distorting entitlements in the Agreement on Agriculture for almost 20 years. Another positive step would be to build upon the work of the last several years and to implement existing mandates such as a permanent solution for public stock holding for food security purposes. This would help in enhancing the trust of developing countries in the WTO's negotiating arm.

4. Developing countries, including LDCs have not been able to achieve an equitable share in world trade. Therefore, the continued availability of special and differential treatment for these countries is imperative for them to address their development aspirations. The reform process should not be used to further restrict the flexibilities and policy space required by developing countries to better integrate with the global trading system. In fact, it should open more opportunities for them, taking into account the contrasting levels of prosperity, unequal levels of economic development and vast disparity in human development indicators, so that global trade becomes sustainable.

## **The Process**

5. An outcome at MC12 is essential for further strengthening the role of the WTO in global trade. I am confident that in the run-up to MC12 our Missions in Geneva will do the necessary spadework to help Ministers arrive at a consensus and reach a meaningful outcome at Nur Sultan.

To achieve this, it is necessary to put in place a structured process that would help us finalize a limited list of focussed, do-able and fair proposals that can be concluded at MC12.

6. Unregulated industrial fishing by some nations has led to a major depletion of the global fish stock. There is an urgent need for strong disciplines to regulate harmful fisheries subsidies to ensure the sustainable use of marine resources for securing inter-generational equity. At the same time, we need to be cognizant of the existence of a large population of subsistence and artisanal fishermen in developing countries, including LDCs, who rely on fishing for their basic livelihood. They have no other livelihood options, and we are all responsible to care for this vulnerable population of marginalised fishermen. This is precisely why both SDG 14.6 and the MC11 decision on fisheries, clearly mandate that there should be appropriate and effective special & differential treatment for developing countries. This could be the basis for a forward looking outcome on fisheries subsidies. Adequate policy space to ensure a decent standard of living for our subsistence-level fishermen by modernizing their fishing fleet and expanding their fishing capacity, is crucial for India.

7. I must also highlight the importance of transparency and fair practices in global trade to ensure that our mutual economic engagement results in growth and prosperity for all.

8. In conclusion, I would like to re-assure everyone and reiterate that India remains a staunch supporter of the rules-based multilateral trading system, and will actively engage with members to address the challenges before the WTO.

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