

**General Council Meeting
March 01-02, 2021**

Statement by India – Delivered by Ambassador & PR to the WTO

**Agenda 11: TRADE AND HEALTH - COVID-19 AND BEYOND –
UPDATE FROM CANADA ON BEHALF OF THE CO-SPONSORS OF
WT/GC/223**

We thank Canada for the update on behalf of the co-sponsors of submission WT/GC/223 entitled COVID-19 AND BEYOND: TRADE AND HEALTH, calling for enhancing cooperation to meet the unprecedented challenge of ensuring availability of essential medical goods, including vaccines.

2. Chair, we wish to reiterate that the rules and agreements inked for a normal situation, not keeping in mind a disaster or pandemic situation, will not deliver the desired and effective outcomes. We are disappointed with most of the contents of the present proposal. These proposals are only trying to justify existing rules which were not made to handle a pandemic, and are not accommodative to take on board new measures. India would have appreciated the co-sponsors support on the TRIPS Waiver Proposal, which would have matched their words in letter and spirit to ‘deliver an effective global response to crisis’ in their submission, through concrete action.

3. Chair, preventing further disruptions in the supply chains of essential medical goods, highlighted in the submission, is one part of the solution. The submission misses out a very significant element in Covid-19 response. While it talks about facilitating movement of goods including medical products and food supplies, it is silent on facilitating movement of healthcare professionals and liberalising measures on that front. Negotiations on new WTO commitments in terms of movement of healthcare professionals including doctors, nurses, paramedics, radiologists, surgeons, dentists, physiotherapists etc. by lowering the barriers, eliminating the restrictions in qualification requirements and procedures, cross-border recognition of professional qualifications, harmonization of entry requirements, easing the entry procedures etc. should also be simultaneously explored, with the aim of concluding such negotiations by MC12.

Let me reiterate our comments on the specific proposals:

4. On Export Restrictions, we would like to highlight that it is a dual use policy tool. During the pandemic, while one country used it for ensuring equitable distribution of critical medicines, diagnostic kits, ventilators and personal protective equipment to large number of countries based on mutually assessed needs and in the absence of this tool, entire supply might have been cornered by the rich and privileged lot with deep pockets as we are certainly not

working in a perfect market condition. On the other hand, one of the proponents of this proposal has chosen to do the opposite and used export restrictions as a tool to prevent cross-border shipment of vaccines from its territory. Therefore, export restrictions will continue to play their role as a policy tool, though it depends as to how a Member chooses to use them.

5. On sharing of experiences and cooperation of the WTO with other organizations, we welcome the proposal and willing to discuss it further with the proponents. We are confident that with the experience of DG Dr. Ngozi, we can certainly achieve better co-ordination with other multilateral organizations.

6. Any binding measure on additional transparency will only come in the way of successful integration of trade and health, particularly during a pandemic.

7. In conclusion, I wish to say that, during the last GC we had expressed our willingness to engage with proponents for a comprehensive proposal, but total silence on their part since then has only confirmed our fear that they are not serious in delivering practical and meaningful response to the pandemic.

Thank you Chair.
