

General Council Meeting
July 22-23, 2020

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

Agenda Item 10: ‘Procedures to strengthen the negotiating function of the WTO statement by the US’ – (WT/GC/W/757/REV.1 & WT/GC/W/764/REV.1)

Thank you, Chair.

2. We thank the United States for their statement under this agenda item.
3. At the outset, we would like to refer to the submission WT/GC/W/765 by India and some other Members, where we have dealt with most of the issues raised by the United States in their paper. We have underlined that Special & Differential Treatment(S&DT) is a treaty embedded right at the WTO and that it cannot be taken away based on certain arbitrary assumptions. In fact, S&DT should continue to underpin existing rules as well as current and future negotiations if Members were to strengthen the negotiating function of the WTO.
4. Chair, Covid-19 crisis is a powerful reminder of our inter-connectedness and no country is reliably insulated from a highly contagious virus, as long as it persists anywhere in the world. However, it is critical to bear in mind that the negative effects of this pandemic are being felt unevenly. The strain on economic, food and livelihood security is disproportionately impacting developing countries and LDCs with large populations, large share of global poor and limited resources. We may be facing the same storm, but certainly, we are not in the same boat.
5. India would like to once again highlight that the draft decision uses parameters, many of them unrelated to development, to target certain Members. While some developing Members may have made progress, old development gaps persist, and in some areas have even widened. Moreover, new divides, especially in the digital and technological spheres, have emerged and are becoming more pronounced. The Covid-19 pandemic has further amplified this divide. Almost half of the world’s population does not have access to high speed broadband and is hence deprived of the access to use of digital platforms for sourcing goods and services, telemedicine, e-education and electronic payments. The S&DT in favor of developing countries and LDCs has never been more relevant at any time in the past than in present circumstances. In fact, the existing S&DT provisions need to be strengthened and made more precise, effective and operational in line with the mandate under para 44 of the Doha Declaration. Chair, India supports the comprehensive submission made by G90 in this regard and hopes that members will engage constructively on the G90 proposal.

6. The basis of S&DT is to give Members time and flexibility to integrate into the rules-based system. Members with huge differences in economic and social development cannot be put in the same category. For instance, to put India, which has an annual per capita income of less than USD 2500, in the same development category as the United States, with a much higher (maybe 25 times) per capita GDP, would be unfair.

7. Chair, there have been repeated assertions by the Member that the draft decision for the General Council relates only to the Special & Differential Treatment in the current and future negotiations and not under the existing WTO Agreements. However, there has been unilateral denying of S&D Treatment to developing countries even under the existing WTO Agreements like Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures and the Agreement on Safeguards.

8. Certain recent actions fuel our apprehensions that the ultimate objective of this submission is to ultimately terminate S&DT at the WTO altogether. To this end, a so-called case by case approach is being proposed, dependent on providing evidence of the need for S&DT, sector wise to start with, which will soon expand to requesting for and seeking S&DT, product by product and line by line. Such an approach will be so burdensome and impractical that it will make S&DT for developing countries and LDCs, extinct and a part of history of the WTO. We cannot allow this to happen and we urge the Member to reconsider the proposal.

9. I thank you, Chair.
