

General Council Meeting
July 22-23, 2020

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

Agenda Item 8: ‘Covid-19 Initiative: Protecting Global food Security through Open Trade – Statement by Co-sponsors of WT/GC/218/Rev.1’

Thank you, Chair.

2. We thank the co-sponsors for their submission.
3. We acknowledge the importance of coordinating the global response in a way that avoids unnecessary disruption in the flow of critical medical and agricultural supplies. India has been playing a proactive role in ensuring the availability of vital drugs such as HCQ and paracetamol across the globe. We have donated and exported critical medical supplies to more than 150 countries following the outbreak of the pandemic. We have also put in place trade facilitation measures such as electronic filing of several trade-related documents to facilitate the uninterrupted movement of goods during the pandemic.
4. We agree that emergency measures taken in the wake of the pandemic should be “targeted, proportionate, transparent, and temporary”.
5. In our understanding, doing away with the useful and limited policy instrument of export restrictions is not a silver bullet that will guarantee the access of food for all. In fact, from what we have seen, this is likely to lead to a flight of these critical products to the highest bidder, making them inaccessible to the resource-poor population. Export restrictions are a WTO-consistent policy tool that are important to prevent critical domestic shortages of essential supplies. Undoubtedly, it is important that these export restrictions are imposed with restraint and are temporary. In this context, I would like to inform the Membership that India has not imposed export restrictions on any agricultural products during the Covid-19 pandemic.
6. In our view, a more effective and lasting way to ensure the food security of the most vulnerable would be by agreeing to eliminate the historic asymmetries in the Agreement on Agriculture, and delivering on the long-standing Ministerial mandate to establish permanent, adequate and accessible disciplines on Public Stockholding for food security purposes by MC12.
7. On the proposal of a separate Working Group, Members are aware that the Committee on Agriculture has agreed to include a dedicated and recurring agenda item on Covid-19 in its meetings till such time as measures taken in the wake of

Covid-19 continue to remain in force. We agree that this is a useful initiative to exchange information, learn from experiences of the membership in tackling the pandemic and review the agricultural measures put in place by Members in the wake of Covid-19. With a recurring agenda item on Covid-19 and agricultural trade added to the agenda of all forthcoming CoA meetings in the short term, we do not see the utility of having a separate working group on Covid-19 and agriculture trade.

8. As a responsible Member of the rules-based multilateral trading system, India stands ready to work constructively with other WTO Members to formulate a balanced, inclusive and calibrated response to Covid-19, in order to protect human life, food security and restore global economic stability.

9. I thank you, Chair.
