

India's Statement
Informal Gathering of WTO Ministers
23 May, 2019
Paris

I would like to thank the Australian Government for hosting this Informal WTO Ministerial and the DG, WTO for his assessment.

Current State of Play

2. As has been the case in the recent period, we are meeting again at a time when the multilateral rules based trading system continues to face serious challenges, which include a spate of unilateral measures and counter measures, deadlock in key areas of negotiations and the ongoing impasse in the Appellate Body. which is now threatening to completely paralyze the dispute settlement mechanism of the WTO. It is our collective responsibility to address these challenges with a sense of urgency.

Delhi Ministerial

3. I take this opportunity to inform that a group of developing countries, broadly representing the sentiments of over 100 countries, met in Delhi on 13-14 May, 2019. 17 Members issued a statement outlining their desire to work collectively to strengthen the WTO to promote development and inclusivity. They urged that the process of WTO reform must keep development at its core, promote inclusive growth and fully take into account the interests and concerns of developing Members. They agreed to consult on various issues of common interest, including comprehensive and effective disciplines on fisheries subsidies with effective S&D provisions.

Fisheries Subsidies

4. India is committed to the WTO Ministerial decision of December 2017 to engage constructively in the fisheries subsidies negotiations. However, while negotiating the disciplines, we must be mindful of the mandates of SDG 14.6 and the MC11 decision on fisheries, both of which clearly mandate that there should be appropriate and effective special & differential treatment for developing countries. These mandates need to be honoured in letter and in spirit. Special & differential treatment should not be replaced or derailed by new proposals and it would not be right to cherry pick elements from the mandate.

5. Any new disciplines must also consider the capacity constraints of developing countries in conducting regular stock assessment based on the best scientific evidence available to them. The proposed new approach of capping of subsidies will unfairly impact developing countries and it will reward the big subsidizers by giving them higher caps, and thus create a permanent asymmetry. Further, the capping proposals do not have an S&DT component, thereby denying much needed policy space to developing countries to develop their livelihood oriented fisheries sector.

6. Subsidies, both specific or non-specific, have the same adverse effect on sustainability of fish stock. The attempt by some Members to discipline only specific fuel subsidies will result in a large proportion of operating cost subsidies being left out of the disciplines.

Development

7. In recent times, we are also witnessing a push by some members in the WTO on the issue of development, pitching for graduation and differentiation amongst developing countries. However, the reality remains that developing countries continue to face formidable challenges in integrating with global trade and in addressing their development goals. India cannot agree to any approach which undermines the centrality of the development dimension in the WTO. Hence, it would be best to refrain from this divisive debate now and instead focus on strengthening the WTO and reviving the negotiating agenda.

WTO Reforms- possible negotiating outcomes for MC12

8. WTO reforms are now at the centre stage of our discussions in Geneva. However, what is of serious concern is the complete lack of balance in this reform agenda and the push for a one-sided narrative with disregard for issues of importance and concern to developing countries. We wish to highlight that WTO reform initiatives must keep development at the centre, promote inclusiveness and non-discrimination, build trust and address the inequalities and glaring asymmetries in existing agreements, which are against the interest of developing countries. Moreover, the first priority for us should be to address the ongoing impasse in the Appellate Body with a sense of urgency to launch the process of filling up the vacancies before December 2019.

9. On the negotiating agenda, agriculture remains a key priority for a large part of the membership and it is important that we re-double our efforts to implement existing mandates and decisions and build on the work of last several years as we approach MC12.

10. Thank you once again.
