

MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE  
Second Session  
Geneva, 18 and 20 May 1998

MINISTERIAL DECLARATION

Adopted on 20 May 1998

1. This Second Session of the Ministerial Conference of the WTO is taking place at a particularly significant time for the multilateral trading system, when the fiftieth anniversary of its establishment is being commemorated. On this occasion we pay tribute to the system's important contribution over the past half-century to growth, employment and stability by promoting the liberalization and expansion of trade and providing a framework for the conduct of international trade relations, in accordance with the objectives embodied in the Preambles to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and the World Trade Organization Agreement. We agree, however, that more remains to be done to enable all the world's peoples to share fully and equitably in these achievements.
2. We underline the crucial importance of the multilateral rule-based trading system. We reaffirm the commitments and assessments we made at Singapore, and we note that the work under existing agreements and decisions has resulted in significant new steps forward since we last met. In particular, we welcome the successful conclusion of the negotiations on basic telecommunications and financial services and we take note of the implementation of the Information Technology Agreement. We renew our commitment to achieve progressive liberalization of trade in goods and services.
3. The fiftieth anniversary comes at a time when the economies of a number of WTO Members are experiencing difficulties as a result of disturbances in financial markets. We take this opportunity to underline that keeping all markets open must be a key element in a durable solution to these difficulties. With this in mind, we reject the use of any protectionist measures and agree to work together in the WTO as in the IMF and the World Bank to improve the coherence of international economic policy-making with a view to maximizing the contribution that an open, rule-based trading system can make to fostering stable growth for economies at all levels of development.
4. We recognize the importance of enhancing public understanding of the benefits of the multilateral trading system in order to build support for it and agree to work towards this end. In this context we will consider how to improve the transparency of WTO operations. We shall also continue to improve our efforts towards the objectives of sustained economic growth and sustainable development.
5. We renew our commitment to ensuring that the benefits of the multilateral trading system are extended as widely as possible. We recognize the need for the system to make its own contribution in response to the particular trade interests and development needs of developing-country Members. We welcome the work already underway in the

Committee on Trade and Development for reviewing the application of special provisions in the Multilateral Trade Agreements and related Ministerial Decisions in favour of developing country Members, and in particular the least-developed among them. We agree on the need for effective implementation of these special provisions.

6. We remain deeply concerned over the marginalization of least-developed countries and certain small economies, and recognize the urgent need to address this issue which has been compounded by the chronic foreign debt problem facing many of them. In this context we welcome the initiatives taken by the WTO in cooperation with other agencies to implement in an integrated manner the Plan of Action for the least-developed countries which we agreed at Singapore, especially through the High-Level Meeting on Least-Developed Countries held in Geneva in October 1997. We also welcome the report of the Director-General on the follow-up of this initiative, to which we attach great importance. We commit ourselves to continue to improve market access conditions for products exported by the least-developed countries on as broad and liberal a basis as possible. We urge Members to implement the market-access commitments that they have undertaken at the High-Level Meeting.

7. We welcome the WTO Members who have joined since we met in Singapore: Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Mongolia, Niger and Panama. We welcome the progress made with 31 applicants currently negotiating their accession and renew our resolution to ensure that the accession processes proceed as rapidly as possible. We recall that accession to the WTO requires full respect of WTO rules and disciplines as well as meaningful market access commitments on the part of acceding candidates.

8. Full and faithful implementation of the WTO Agreement and Ministerial Decisions is imperative for the credibility of the multilateral trading system and indispensable for maintaining the momentum for expanding global trade, fostering job creation and raising standards of living in all parts of the world. When we meet at the Third Session we shall further pursue our evaluation of the implementation of individual agreements and the realization of their objectives. Such evaluation would cover, *inter alia*, the problems encountered in implementation and the consequent impact on the trade and development prospects of Members. We reaffirm our commitment to respect the existing schedules for reviews, negotiations and other work to which we have already agreed.

9. We recall that the Marrakesh Agreement Establishing the World Trade Organization states that the WTO shall provide the forum for negotiations among its Members concerning their multilateral trade relations in matters dealt with under the agreements in the Annexes to the Agreement, and that it may also provide a forum for further negotiations among its Members concerning their multilateral trade relations, and a framework for the implementation of the results of such negotiations, as may be decided by the Ministerial Conference. In the light of paragraphs 1-8 above, we decide that a process will be established under the direction of the General Council to ensure full and faithful implementation of existing agreements, and to prepare for the Third Session of the Ministerial Conference. This process shall enable the General Council to submit recommendations regarding the WTO's work programme, including further liberalization sufficiently broad-based to respond to the range of interests and concerns of all Members, within the WTO framework, that will enable us to take decisions at the Third Session of the Ministerial Conference. In this regard, the General Council will meet in special session in September 1998 and periodically thereafter to ensure full and timely completion of its work, fully respecting the principle of decision-making by consensus. The General Council's work programme shall encompass the following:

- (a) recommendations concerning:
  - (i) the issues, including those brought forward by Members, relating to implementation of existing agreements and decisions;
  - (ii) the negotiations already mandated at Marrakesh, to ensure that such negotiations begin on schedule;
  - (iii) future work already provided for under other existing agreements and decisions taken at Marrakesh;
- (b) recommendations concerning other possible future work on the basis of the work programme initiated at Singapore;
- (c) recommendations on the follow-up to the High-Level Meeting on Least-Developed Countries;
- (d) recommendations arising from consideration of other matters proposed and agreed to by Members concerning their multilateral trade relations.

10. The General Council will also submit to the Third Session of the Ministerial Conference, on the basis of consensus, recommendations for decision concerning the further organization and management of the work programme arising from the above, including the scope, structure and time-frames, that will ensure that the work programme is begun and concluded expeditiously.

11. The above work programme shall be aimed at achieving overall balance of interests of all Members.

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