

WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

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Committee on Regional Trade Agreements

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COMMITTEE ON REGIONAL TRADE AGREEMENTS

A proposal on RTAs from Australia; Canada; Chile; China; Hong Kong, China; India; Japan; Mexico; New Zealand; Norway; the Republic of Korea; and the Separate Customs Territory of Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen and Matsu

The following communication, dated 20 September 2011 has been received from the Delegations of Australia; Canada; Chile; China; Hong Kong, China; India; Japan, Mexico; New Zealand; Norway; the Republic of Korea and the Separate Customs Territory of Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen and Matsu.

1. On 2 December 2009, the Chairman of the WTO's Seventh Ministerial Conference noted in relation to the WTO's discussions on RTAs that "there is still room for improvement, through ... highlighting better the common elements in different RTAs".

2. Since then, several Members proposed that further work be done on this area in the Committee on Regional Trade Agreements, including through a more systematic analysis and discussion of the information provided through the RTA Transparency Mechanism, to identify general trends and practices in RTAs. The WTO's World Trade Report 2011 also recently provided a useful preliminary analysis of this kind and posed some important questions about the implications for the multilateral trading system that arise from the proliferation of many and different RTAs.

3. There is scope for Members to better use the information on RTAs, including that provided through the Transparency Mechanism, the World Trade Report and elsewhere, to improve our collective understanding of the cross-cutting elements of RTAs, both their market access and regulatory aspects. On this basis, Members should also engage in a discussion about the implications for the operation of the multilateral trading system.

4. It would therefore be useful for Members to engage in a work programme in the Committee on Regional Trade Agreements, based on further detailed factual reports to be prepared by the Secretariat on specific areas of RTAs, as identified in the issue headings contained in the factual presentations drawn up under the Transparency Mechanism. The reports would be factual in nature and identify trends and practices across RTAs in each area. The work programme would not seek to change WTO disciplines, create de facto benchmarks or supplant the work of the Rules Negotiating Group. The papers would emulate the approach taken in earlier papers prepared in 2002 on Rules of Origin (WT/REG/W/45) and coverage of RTAs (WT/REG/W/46).

Proposed Ministerial Language

5. **Ministers noted the growth and increasing prominence of RTAs in world trade, and saw value in WTO Members assessing the implications of this for the multilateral trading system. Ministers, noting that the Committee on Regional Trade Agreements (CRTA) has the mandate**

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to consider the systemic implications of RTAs for the multilateral trading system¹, therefore direct the CRTA to undertake a work programme, using factual reports to be prepared by the Secretariat, to consider the cross-cutting elements, trends and practices in RTAs. This work programme could eventually help Members reflect on the implications for the multilateral trading system and gather collective views on negotiating RTAs that uphold the multilateral trading system. The results of this work programme will be reported to the Ninth Ministerial Conference of the WTO.

¹ WT/L/127.