

PRESS RELEASE

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AGENCIES TO BOOST DEVELOPING COUNTRIES' PARTICIPATION IN SETTING FOOD SAFETY AND RELATED NORMS

At the WTO Ministerial Conference in Doha, Qatar, five international organizations have issued a joint statement committing themselves to help developing countries participate more fully in setting international norms for sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures — food safety and animal and plant health.

The issue has been discussed in the WTO in the debate over developing countries' difficulties in implementing current WTO agreements. The new statement commits the organizations to strengthen developing countries' capacity to establish and implement SPS measures as well as to participate fully in the work of international organizations responsible for setting international standards, guidelines and recommendations. The agencies are also committed to coordinating the technical assistance they give to these countries as part of this effort.

The five organizations are the WTO, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Animal Health Organization (Office International des Epizooties or OIE), the World Health Organization (WHO), and the World Bank.

Three organizations or conventions, sometimes unofficially described as the "three sisters", are responsible for international standards, guidelines and recommendations relevant to the WTO SPS Agreement. The OIE handles animal health. The FAO and WHO jointly provide the secretariat of Codex Alimentarius, which deals with food safety. The International Plant Protection Convention (IPC), which deals with plant health, whose secretariat is provided by the FAO.

Developing countries say they face problems in exporting food products in particular both because they have difficulty meeting standards in importing countries and because they are unable to participate fully in developing internationally-agreed standards. The joint statement is designed to address this problem.

This is what the statement says:

MORE

**Participation of Developing Countries in the Development and Application of
International Standards, Guidelines and Recommendations on Food Safety, Animal and
Plant Health**

**A Joint Statement by
the Directors-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations,
the Office International des Epizooties,
the World Health Organization, the World Trade Organization
and the President of the World Bank**

Food safety and animal and plant health are essential components of sustainable development, particularly as they contribute to public health, the reduction of poverty, food security and the protection of the environment.

The Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC), the Office International des Epizooties (OIE), and the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) are the recognized instruments for the development of international standards, guidelines and recommendations to assist in ensuring food safety for human health protection as well as animal and plant health, and to facilitate trade.¹ The objective of international harmonization of sanitary and phytosanitary measures is to reduce the need for individual countries to develop and justify their own measures, to limit disputes and to take advantage of international trade opportunities.

We are committed to strengthen the capacity of developing countries to establish and implement science-based sanitary and phytosanitary measures, to meet the sanitary and phytosanitary requirements of trade partners and to participate fully in the work of standard setting organizations in the establishment of international standards, guidelines and recommendations. To this end, the FAO, OIE, WHO, WTO, the World Bank and other multilateral, regional and bilateral agencies undertake technical assistance activities and investment in infrastructure, to assist developing countries in the establishment and implementation of appropriate food safety and animal and plant health measures.

We reaffirm our commitment to work together on the basis of our respective mandates and to further exploit the synergies between our organizations, standard-setting bodies and other agencies. We agree to explore jointly new technical and financial mechanisms for coordination and resource mobilization and to build alliances between standard-setting bodies and the implementing and financing agencies so as to ensure the most effective use of technical and financial resources.

This statement is submitted to inform the Fourth WTO Ministerial Conference in Doha of our commitment to enhance developing countries' capacity to participate effectively in the development and application of international standards and to take full advantage of trade opportunities.

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¹ FAO provides the Secretariat for the IPPC. FAO and WHO provide the Joint Secretariat for the CAC.