

# WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

RESTRICTED

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**Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures**

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## **STATEMENT MADE BY THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION AT THE MEETING OF 20-21 MARCH 1996**

WHO has had observer status in this Committee since last year. As work has progressed in this Committee, WHO has also initiated an internal review process in order to re-define the new role it will play in the context of the SPS Agreement and other WTO Agreements. During this process, it has been pointed out that the health sector at national level has not always been fully informed of the implications and consequences of the new WTO Agreements. This may be partly due to an inadequate communication within government branches.

In this regard, we are planning to organize an information meeting for the delegates attending the forthcoming session of the World Health Assembly starting on 20 May. This information meeting would give special focus to the role of the health sector in the context of several health-related WTO Agreements, including the SPS Agreement.

WHO strongly believes that the information network between different sectors should be strengthened urgently, and all relevant government ministries should have access to necessary and pertinent information. Therefore, from a WHO point of view, we would very much appreciate it if the distinguished delegates could take note of this situation and forward this important message to their colleagues in the health department who are members of their respective delegations to the World Health Assembly.

WHO hopes this initiative will also help ensure the high-level commitment of decision makers in the health sector. This will be very useful when the Members of WTO, the majority of which are also Member States of WHO (developing or industrialized), come to comply with the SPS Agreement which, after all, addresses to a large extent food safety and health protection. We believe that the involvement of all sectors concerned, and the forming of a true consensus and coordination among those sectors, are keys to the successful implementation of the Agreement. In this context, it is recalled that the WTO health-related agreements place an increased responsibility upon WHO's normative functions. This creates additional challenges and a need for resources at a time when WHO is in a financial difficulty as are other United Nations Agencies.

WHO wishes to thank its partners for their continuous collaboration, and hopes to receive increased support from Member countries and other organizations so that it can continue and strengthen assistance to WHO Member States, in collaboration with WTO, FAO and the OIE.