



MINUTES OF MEETING

HELD IN THE CENTRE WILLIAM RAPPARD AND IN VIRTUAL FORMAT ON 22-23 AND 31 JULY 2020

Chairperson: H.E. Dr. David Walker (New Zealand)

On behalf of the General Council, the Chairman expressed deep condolences for the demise of Ambassador Christopher Oyanga Aparr, Uganda's Permanent Representative to the United Nations and the other International Organizations.

The Chairman and the Director-General bade farewell to Ambassador Frances Lisson (Australia); Ambassador Pedro Pedrosa Cuesta (Cuba); Ambassador Geert Muylle (Belgium); Ambassador Anatole Fabien Marie Nkou (Cameroon); Ambassador Terhi Hakala (Finland); and Ambassador Hajah Masurai Haji Masri (Brunei Darussalam) and expressed appreciation for their valuable contribution during their time as Permanent Representatives.

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¹ The proposed agenda was circulated in document WT/GC/W/802.

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1 REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE TRADE NEGOTIATIONS COMMITTEE AND REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL²

1.1. The Chairman recalled that, as had been announced at the beginning of the General Council meeting the previous day, 22 July, this was the last meeting of the General Council at which the current Director-General, Mr. Roberto Azevêdo, was present with Members in that capacity. The Director-General would address the Council that morning, after which the Chairman would open the floor to delegations. And before he offered the Director-General the floor, he wished to say a few words, on behalf of the Membership, to Director-General Roberto Azevêdo.

1.2. On the first address made by Mr. Azevêdo to the General Council as Director-General, he had said that the strength of the organization was found in Members – the ones who held the wheel of the ship. The Director-General could suggest the direction, but both the Director-General and the Membership should chart the path together.

1.3. That had been the first of many nautical themed speeches over the past seven years. Anchored in the principles of transparency and inclusiveness, his leadership had provided impetus for the WTO "to deliver on that vital mission of supporting growth and development around the world".

1.4. And he had spared no efforts in achieving that goal. Already, in his first 100 days in office, he had launched the Room W process in the lead-up to MC9 in Bali and had convened back-to-back open-ended meetings, sometimes lasting throughout the night until early in the morning. He had stayed the entire time without taking a break – listening to Members and facilitating convergence seamlessly; and the result was testament to that. That had set the tone for his tenure as WTO Director-General – based on patience, diplomacy and pragmatism.

1.5. His wise leadership and political acumen had helped Members reach hallmark decisions such as the Agreement on Trade Facilitation in Bali and the Decision on Export Competition in Nairobi. His commitment towards making implementation of agreements and processes at the WTO more inclusive had resulted in initiatives such as the TFA Facility and the WTO fisheries trust fund. He had also further reinforced the WTO's technical assistance and capacity building activities.

1.6. He had also made the WTO more accessible to its stakeholders – for example by introducing the "Trade Dialogues" forum to discuss trade issues that confronted businesses, introducing the Trade Barometers, organising the first ever World Cotton Day, advocating to keep finance flowing for trade, launching the Young Professionals Programme and implementing policies consistent with his role as an International Gender Champion, among many others.

² As had been indicated to delegations in the Chairman's communication on 17 July, and at the Formal TNC meeting on 20 July, the General Council took up Item 1 of the agenda on 23 July.

1.7. It had not all been smooth sailing, however. Over the past seven years, the international trade landscape had rapidly evolved. Trade tensions had become even more pronounced. Institutional challenges had confronted the WTO – affecting all its pillars. And now, a global pandemic.

1.8. Through all of this, he had skilfully sought to navigate the organization even through rough seas. Most recently he had made it possible for WTO work to continue during a pandemic, including through virtual means. And even more importantly, he had been an advocate of ways for the WTO to contribute to the fight against COVID-19 and its economic repercussions.

1.9. For all of this, they were all grateful. In moving forward, he hoped that the Membership could continue to count on him to champion the multilateral trading system and the objectives for which the WTO had been established. On behalf of the General Council, he extended his heartfelt thanks to the Director-General and wished him every success and happiness for the future.

1.10. The Director-General, Mr Roberto Azevêdo, made a farewell statement to the General Council. His statement was circulated as JOB/GC/241 and is reproduced in Annex 1 to the present records.

1.11. The representatives of Brazil; Guatemala (GRULAC); Thailand; Switzerland; Tanzania; Singapore; Barbados; Australia; China; Honduras; Egypt; Costa Rica; Ukraine; the European Union; Ecuador; Canada; the United Kingdom; Sri Lanka; Jamaica (ACP); the United States; North Macedonia; India; Tajikistan; Viet Nam (ASEAN); the Dominican Republic; Japan; Pakistan; Chad (LDCs); Botswana (African Group); the Russian Federation; Burkina Faso (C-4); Cote d'Ivoire; Zimbabwe; the Republic of Korea; Turkey; Afghanistan; Nigeria; the Philippines; Senegal; Kenya; Nepal; Norway; Cambodia; Mozambique; Haiti; Israel; Chinese Taipei; Angola; Bangladesh; Vanuatu (Pacific Group); Uruguay; South Africa; Indonesia; Ghana; Iceland; Fiji; Albania; Namibia; Malaysia; Togo; Cameroon; New Zealand; Myanmar; Gabon; Paraguay; Qatar; Peru; Mexico; Colombia; Hong Kong, China; Liechtenstein; Georgia; Saint Lucia; Liberia; Zambia; The Gambia; Brunei Darussalam; the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Arab Group) and Kazakhstan took the floor to express their gratitude to the Director-General and to bid him farewell. Their statements are reproduced in Annex 2 to the present records.

1.12. The Chairman thanked Members for their statements that day as a tribute to Mr. Roberto Azevêdo to his time as WTO Director-General. On a personal note, he had mentioned when he had taken up that role that they had been colleagues when they had been previously together in Geneva, Mr. Azevêdo then being Brazil's Permanent Representative. He well remembered paying his courtesy call on him at the Brazilian Mission. They both had been associated with the multilateral trading system for some time and his considerable reputation preceded him.

1.13. Throughout the time since, the Chairman said he had greatly appreciated the opportunity to work with him in many different capacities, including over those past several years, as the various twists of fate had brought them to be sitting there together that day. Again, on behalf of the General Council, he extended heartfelt thanks to Mr. Roberto Azevêdo as WTO Director-General and wished him every success and happiness for the future.

1.14. The Director-General appreciated the words that he had heard that day that would make leaving Geneva much more difficult. That day would follow him and his wife, Ambassador Maria Nazareth Farani Azevêdo, for the rest of their lives. It would give them comfort when they faced hardships. And they were coming – he did not know when, but they were coming.

1.15. He valued the fact that Members had also extended very nice and kind words for his wife and his family. His wife had been more than a partner throughout. She had always been there giving him her advice and counsel. His doors at the WTO had always been open to every delegation and he had to tell them that his doors would continue to be open wherever they were, not only his office doors but his home doors as well.

1.16. He thanked the team that had been by his side during that journey the whole time. Tim Yeend had been more than a Chef de Cabinet. He had been a partner and a friend. If he had made less mistakes, it had been because of his advice and his support. He thanked Mr. Yeend for everything he had done during those years and was sure that their partnership was going to go much longer.

1.17. He also thanked his advisers, Wayne McCook, Aegyung Jung, Thais Mesquita, Trineesh Biswas, as well as those who had left already – Graça Andresen Guimarães, David Tinline and Tatiana Lacerda Prazeres. He thanked the support team headed Cathy Boyle and before that by Jenifer Mutano as well as Tilde Baptista, Ella Dixon, Laurie Caré, Catherine Bollard, Denise Machado and those who had left already.

1.18. The Director-General extended his gratitude once again to the DDGs. He would be leaving but they would be staying a little longer, so they still had some work to do in the transition period. Finally, he thanked the whole Secretariat. He reiterated that that day was going to be one to remember that would comfort him in his future journey. He would be cheering and supporting unconditionally all the efforts of the Members in the organization.

1.19. The General Council took note of the statements.

2 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BALI, NAIROBI AND BUENOS AIRES OUTCOMES – STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

2.1. The Chairman recalled³ that the item remained on the agenda so that the General Council could continue to follow up on the decisions adopted in Bali, Nairobi and Buenos Aires in a horizontal and transparent manner.

2.2. His statement that day was going to focus on the areas where there had been new developments since the previous meeting, on the basis of the updates that he had received from the Chairs of the regular bodies – whom he thanked for their cooperation. Under that item, he would provide a report on recent activities under the Work Programme on Electronic Commerce.

2.3. Starting with TRIPS non-violation and situation complaints, the Chair-designate had held a number of small group consultations in April and May, as well as an informal open-ended meeting of the TRIPS Council on 30 June, at which a number of delegations had indicated their intention to engage actively to advance the issue before MC12.

2.4. On the LDC Services Waiver, at the meeting of the Council for Trade in Services on 1 July, the LDC Group had called on the Secretariat to build upon the work undertaken for the workshop on the LDC Services Waiver of 2019. The Group had also urged notifying Members to share information on how they were orienting LDC service suppliers to the benefits available under the Waiver, and had called for the Waiver review process to take into account the impact of COVID-19.

2.5. On Aid for Trade, at the CTD meeting held earlier that month, in view of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on many aspects of the work, Members had agreed to extend the Work Programme on Aid for Trade, in its then current form, until the end of 2022. Members had also agreed that the Aid for Trade Global Review, which was normally scheduled for 2021, should be rescheduled for 2022 instead. Members were also looking at additional activities in the Aid for Trade area to reflect the impact of COVID-19, to be reflected in an addendum in the current work programme.

2.6. Regarding the Trade Facilitation Agreement, since his previous report, an additional ratification had been received, which brought the total number of Members having ratified the Agreement to 152.

2.7. And finally, on the Work Programme on Electronic Commerce, he recalled that at the March General Council meeting, his predecessor had reported on her consultations following the General Council's adoption of a decision at its December 2019 meeting in which Members had agreed to reinvigorate the work under the Work Programme, including having structured discussions. Members had also agreed to maintain the moratorium until MC12 and for the General Council to report to MC12.

2.8. In line with the Decision, he was pleased to note that substantive discussions on the moratorium had been held recently. First, a webinar on the moratorium had been organised by the Secretariat on 13 July, and the more than 300 participants were testimony to the importance

³ The Chairman's statement was circulated in document JOB/GC/242.

delegations attached to the matter. The webinar had focused on two main issues – quantifying the moratorium and the moratorium's impact on economic development. Members had had the opportunity to hear the perspectives of the authors of the different studies on the impact of the moratorium. It was his hope that the webinar had shed more light and insight on issues surrounding the moratorium of use to delegations as they continued their deliberations.

2.9. On Tuesday, 14 July, he had convened an informal open-ended meeting on the Work Programme, in line with the Members' decision to have structured discussions. The meeting had provided the opportunity to discuss two submissions on the moratorium, as well as the Work Programme in general. Over 30 delegations had intervened – and he thanked again all Members for their constructive engagement. It had been clear from the discussion, however, that Members continued to have divergent views on the scope and impact of the moratorium.

2.10. Looking towards MC12, delegations had reiterated their views, with some calling for a permanent moratorium, some calling for it to be lifted to allow Members to have policy space and others calling for the continuation of the current practice of renewal. Many delegations had referred to the importance of e-commerce particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some delegations had noted the need to look at other aspects of the Work Programme including addressing the digital divide given the importance of ensuring digital inclusion. Reference had also been made to internal taxes and the need for Members to share best practices and experience. Other issues raised had included the impact of 3D printing and the importance of discussing data. In his view, and given the continued divergent views, it was important for delegations to deepen engagement on that issue ahead of MC12.

2.11. As he had mentioned at the Informal Open-ended meeting, in addition to discussions on the moratorium, work had continued in the relevant bodies, particularly in the Council for Trade in Services and the Council for Trade in Goods. Discussions in both bodies had noted how COVID-19 had highlighted the importance of e-commerce and the need to address the challenges faced. In particular, at the CTG meeting, the LDC Group had stressed the importance of e-commerce for the developmental, economic and social aspects of LDCs. The CTS had had a substantive discussion on how to support digital capability of businesses and consumers, following a submission by a group of Members.

2.12. However, the level of engagement was differing among the four relevant bodies. He therefore wished to encourage delegations to discuss the Work Programme in all the relevant bodies, including the CTD and TRIPS Council. As General Council Chair, he remained ready to consult with Members on the way forward and to facilitate any further meetings as necessary.

2.13. The representative of India thanked the Chairman and the Chairs of the bodies mandated under the Work Programme on Electronic Commerce for their respective reports. He also thanked the Chairman, the Secretariat and the Members for their engagement during the Webinar on the Moratorium on Customs Duties on Electronic Transmissions held on 13 July and for the open-ended informal meeting of the General Council on the Work Programme on Electronic Commerce held on 14 July. Such engagements by the Membership were critical building blocks towards the reinvigoration of the work under the Work Programme on Electronic Commerce and for achieving clarity on scope, definition and impact of the moratorium, as mandated by the General Council in December 2019.

2.14. As it had been emphasised by many others, it was important for Members to come to a common understanding on the scope of the moratorium. Without clarity on the scope of the moratorium, there could be no predictability for business, trade and industry. More importantly, governments would have not known what their obligations and rights were. Only a clear understanding on the scope and an appreciation of its impact would have helped the Ministers take a well-considered and wise decision on the moratorium at MC12.

2.15. As far as India's understanding on the scope and impact of the moratorium was concerned, the same was reflected in India's joint proposal with South Africa, namely, "The E-Commerce Moratorium: Scope and its Impact" contained in document WT/GC/W/798. While looking forward to more intensive discussions on the various aspects of the moratorium in various settings, India emphasised that in the light of the Buenos Aires and the December 2019 General Council Decisions on the Work Programme on Electronic Commerce, it would have been useful and productive for the

membership to continue with the periodic reviews of the Work Programme by the General Council in its sessions of July and December until the following Ministerial Conference.

2.16. Moving towards the issue of Public Stockholding, India took that opportunity to request the Members to constructively engage in the negotiations in the issue of public stockholding for food security purposes as had been committed in the Ministerial Conferences in Bali and Nairobi. A permanent solution in that issue, which was simple and could be used by developing countries, would have gone a long way in addressing their genuine concerns relating to food security of the most vulnerable section of the society.

2.17. The then current pandemic had shown how adversely the poor in the developing countries were impacted. Developing governments had been struggling with the issues faced by the most vulnerable sections of the society, including agricultural farmers and labourers. In those circumstances, it became all the more important for the developing countries to have adequate flexibility in that area. India would have appreciated a constructive approach by Members to comply with the mandates of the Ministers in that area.

2.18. As a responsible Member of the WTO, India had been consistently complying with its notification obligations at the WTO, including with the notification obligations prescribed in document G/AG/2. Its track-record with meeting its obligations had shown that its transparency obligations had been much better than that of several Members who were pressing for enhanced transparency at the WTO.

2.19. Pursuant to the Bali Ministerial Decision on Public Stockholding for Food Security Purposes and the General Council Decision of 2014 as contained in document WT/L/939, India had notified the Committee on Agriculture that it had, for the first time, exceeded the de minimis level of market price support for rice for the marketing year 2018-2019, by a very minor margin of 1.4%.

2.20. Market price support for rice, a traditional staple food crop had been notified under Article 7.2(b) of the Agreement on Agriculture in pursuance of public stockholding programmes for food security purposes. India's public stockholding programmes for food security purposes, covering rice and a number of other commodities, had been consistently reported in its Table DS:1 notifications since 1995.

2.21. The programme was consistent with the criteria mentioned in paragraph 3, footnote 5, and footnotes 5&6 of Annex 2 to the Agreement on Agriculture. Further, the stocks under the programme were acquired and released in order to meet the domestic food security needs of India's poor and vulnerable population, and not to impede commercial trade or food security of others. For those reasons, the notified level of market price support for rice was covered by the peace clause set out in the Bali Ministerial Decision on Public Stockholding for Food Security Purposes in document WT/MIN (13)/38 and the General Council Decision in document WT/L/939.

2.22. India stood ready to engage on that issue with other Members and would answer specific questions that Members could have had on that subject in the meeting of the Committee of Agriculture meeting on 28 July.

2.23. The representative of South Africa thanked the Chairman for convening the seminar on e-commerce and the Informal Open-ended meeting on the 1998 Work Programme. Ministers in 1998 had agreed on the establishment of "a comprehensive work programme to examine all trade-related issues of global e-commerce". The Work Programme was a critical aspect that should have informed decision-making on the moratorium.

2.24. When the moratorium on customs duties on electronic transmissions had been agreed in 1998, there was no clarity on the scope of the moratorium and how that could have unfolded with the digital revolution. Members therefore had agreed to disciplines on electronic transmissions without a clear indication of the fiscal, industrial and economic implications. South Africa and India's paper in document WT/GC/W/798 dated 11 March 2020 had provided their understanding of the scope of the moratorium and its implications. They had drawn from a number of studies which they had outlined in the paper to define the scope of the moratorium on electronic transmissions as applicable to physical goods which had become digitized or which were digitizable including from the WTO Secretariat.

2.25. The key concern was the impact of the moratorium on customs duties on electronic transmissions on their efforts to industrialise digitally including its impact in undermine existing industries. Meaningful progress on the work programme was important due to the value they attached to effective and inclusive participation in e-commerce and the digital economy, and the role it could have played in the development of their economies. Governments should have been able to promote digital industrialization and ensure that e-commerce was conducted in a fair manner and contributed to the resources of government just as every other economic activity was typically required to do.

2.26. The benefit that developing countries derived from e-commerce could not be limited to consumer welfare. While that was important, the role of trade policy was more relevant as an instrument of industrial development. The meaningful economic impact for developing countries arising from e-commerce would be from an industrial and job creation point of view which would promote resilient economies and sustainable development. The moratorium therefore had long-term implications for the developmental prospects of developing countries.

2.27. South Africa reiterated that tariffs as a policy tool would be targeted and applied strategically on only those areas where Members had an interest to advance their digital industrialization strategy. Tariffs and government support had been used by many countries to nurture the digital economy and associated technologies. Tariffs played an important role in protecting infant domestic industries from more established overseas competitors until they had attained competitiveness and economies of scale.

2.28. Digital inclusion would depend on the ability of many developing countries and LDCs to develop their digital capacities. In view of the first mover advantages, technology, data and digital divide, developing countries needed appropriate legal framework and policy discretion to strategically deploy tariffs as an industrial policy tool in line with their development objectives.

2.29. For the last 22 years there had been a remarkably inefficient situation in which similar goods such as e-books and physical books were receiving different policy and tax treatment. One could not ignore the revenue losses estimated by UNCTAD as amounting to USD 10.1 billion per annum for developing countries if bound rates were applied and USD 5 billion when based on applied rates.

2.30. A true reinvigoration of the 1998 Work Programme was needed through the relevant bodies taking up the discussion based on their mandate. The priority had to be the scope of the moratorium which would inform decision-making on the moratorium at MC12 as well as the developmental aspects that would promote inclusive participation in the digital economy under the CTD. South Africa also called for the General Council to review progress on the Work Programme as had been proposed by India.

2.31. The representative of Chad, on behalf of the LDCs, said that the decisions taken to increase integration into global trade were still the LDC's priority. They sought and called for the full implementation of decisions on DFQF market access, Services Waiver for LDC Service Providers and Preferential Rules of Origin for LDCs. The LDCs thanked all Members offering preferences and called upon those that had not yet done so to make their contribution. Their aim was the full utilization of the preferences granted. That meant that certain barriers needed to be lifted. They needed to provide information to and raise awareness among those offering preferences as well as the demandeurs concerning the opportunities that were then available for trade. That called for sufficient support from their trading partners and the WTO Secretariat to implement the means necessary to make those preferences a reality and then use them.

2.32. The representative of Botswana, on behalf of the African Group, said that the 1998 Work Programme on Electronic Commerce remained an important element in the African Group's ongoing discussions, also with respect to the moratorium on the application of customs duties on electronic transmissions, as well as the broader crosscutting issues envisaged under Paragraphs 2 to 5 of the Work Programme. In that context, the African Group lent its support to reinvigorating discussions on the basis of the Work Programme.

2.33. While the COVID-19 pandemic continued to evolve, particularly in Africa where it had arrived late compared to other continents, it had had a devastating impact on the services sector which had reduced demand on certain sectors such as tourism and transport heavily affecting much needed

income from those sectors since many of their Members remained under lockdown. The pandemic had therefore become a serious economic crisis.

2.34. Under those conditions, the uptick of e-commerce had been accelerated. Considering that the COVID-19 crisis was likely to have longer lasting effects, any post COVID-19 recovery strategy had to aim to bridge the digital divide to allow more countries to take advantage of digitalization. In that connection, the African Group would contribute constructively to the discussion of the Work Programme and in due course submit a proposal that sought to capture the developmental aspects of the Work Programme.

2.35. The representative of Indonesia reminded Members that there were a lot of work that needed to be done for the implementation of the Ministerial Outcomes to ensure meaningful processes on the mandated issues. Agriculture issues and fisheries subsidies were among the top priorities that needed their utmost attention. Ensuring meaningful progresses on those two mandated issues would help the organization's credibility and in fulfilling Members' promise as an organization. On Agriculture, Indonesia reiterated the need to achieve the relevant mandate based on the Bali Ministerial Conference in particular on a permanent solution on public stockholding for food security purposes and the importance of the comprehensive and balanced outcome on a special safeguard mechanism.

2.36. Concerning the negotiation process and the COVID-19 pandemic, Indonesia was of the view that Members' future work would depend on the course of the pandemic. Members needed to be cognizant of the fact that global trade could not be brought back to normal without global cooperation in combating that pandemic. Members needed to check their role – and they could definitely take an important role in that global effort including through cooperation in ensuring that the intellectual property regime did not become a hindrance to global public health objectives. Watching on the sidelines would further deteriorate the relevance of the organization.

2.37. The representative of Switzerland expressed appreciation both for the workshop held on 13 July and for the Open-ended meeting of 14 July. In the Open-ended meeting, Members had an exchange on two working documents, one submitted by Switzerland and 12 Members, and the other submitted by India and South Africa. Switzerland considered that those exchanges had been informative as they had allowed to better understand the economic implications of the moratorium.

2.38. Some legitimate concerns in the field of competition policy and taxation had been expressed. Tariffs – and in general trade policy tools – were not however suited to address those issues. Furthermore, digital production and industrial manufacturing had different types of inputs, production patterns and speed of technological evolution. Considering applying tariffs to the digital ecosystem would most likely miss its target of protecting a nascent digital production. Switzerland was looking forward to continuing the exchanges on the moratorium.

2.39. The representative of the European Union noted that a Member had invoked the Bali Ministerial Decision on Public Stockholding for the first time. The European Union was currently examining the relevant domestic support notification and accompanying data of that notification. The European Union looked forward to a review of the notification in the upcoming meeting of the Committee on Agriculture.

2.40. On the Nairobi Decision on Export Competition, the European Union noted that that decision required sixteen Members to submit schedule modifications. Three Members were yet to do so. The European Union urged the Members concerned to submit the necessary schedule modifications as soon as possible.

2.41. The representative of Sri Lanka thanked the Secretariat for having organised the Seminar on the E-Commerce Moratorium and also the Chairman for his report urging Members to exchange their views with the aim of narrowing their differences on the subject matter. Digitalization affected different countries in different ways. Individual governments required policy space to regulate the digital economy in order to foster various legitimate public policy objectives. The UNCTAD Trade and Development Report of 2018 had found the asymmetric composition of markets. The price in favour of firms from developed countries made it very difficult for individual developing countries, particularly the small economies such as Sri Lanka, to regulate the digital economy and to have a significant economic role in global value chains.

2.42. The vast majority of developing countries were net importers of digital products. If they were to develop and make progress on the Sustainable Development Goals, those countries required the implementation of active industrial policies to get some benefits of e-commerce, including the use of tariff policies for the digital sector. The moratorium would however exactly prohibit Members from putting in place that needed tariff. Further, with the advent of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the advance of 3D Printing technologies in the future, carefully negotiated GATT bound rates would be brought to zero for their digitized counterparts.

2.43. With zero tariffs, the moratorium was likely to make developing Members even more dependent on imports of digital products from developed Members. That would have a huge negative impact on industrialization, particularly digital industrialization and trade competitiveness of those Members. It would inhibit the ability of developing Members to protect their domestic digital industries resulting in loss of jobs and increasing poverty. All in all, that would have catastrophic effects on industrial development and the attainment of the SDGs. The removal of the moratorium by no way meant that the Members would necessarily impose customs duties across the board. The key was policy space and to use such policy space appropriately for domestic digital industrialization and the generation of local jobs in the area of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

2.44. In view of the above, Members needed to first have precise clarity on the scope of the moratorium to be well informed of the obligations that they would be taking under that moratorium. Sri Lanka therefore called on Members to carry out their work in relation to the Work Programme in different Committees with the view of having clarification on the scope of the moratorium. That would eventually take Members forward to decide on the future of the moratorium in the run up to MC12.

2.45. The representative of Namibia associated with the statement by the African Group. The WTO, as a rules-based institution, provided an opportunity for economic growth and development for all Members by reducing obstacles to international trade and ensuring a level playing field for all. Having said that, Namibia pointed out that agriculture remained an important issue for negotiations with a view to addressing trade-distortive effects and to further provide African countries the opportunity to have new policy space to address food security concerns through concerted efforts to ensure that public stockholding was considered for food security purposes.

2.46. On rules, Namibia thanked the Chairman of the Negotiating Group on Rules for the draft consolidated text which was currently receiving the necessary attention by Namibia's capital-based fisheries experts. Namibia looked forward to meeting the SDG Target 14.6 deadline of 2020. Members should however be mindful that the process of negotiations should be transparent and inclusive for all Members by ensuring the physical participation of capital-based officials from fisheries ministries. On e-commerce, Namibia re-emphasised the need to find a permanent solution on the moratorium in the midst of COVID-19.

2.47. The General Council took note of the statements.

3 WORK PROGRAMME ON SMALL ECONOMIES – REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE DEDICATED SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE ON TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT

3.1. The Chairman recalled that in line with the agreement in the General Council in 2002, the Work Programme on Small Economies was a standing item on the agenda and the Committee on Trade and Development reported regularly to the Council on the progress of work in its Dedicated Sessions. In Buenos Aires, Ministers had adopted a Decision reaffirming their commitment to the Work Programme and instructing the CTD to continue its work in Dedicated Sessions under the overall responsibility of the General Council.

3.2. Ambassador Mohammad Qurban Haqjo (Afghanistan), Chairman of the Dedicated Session of the CTD, recalled that, as he had reported to the General Council in May, a meeting of the CTD's Dedicated Session on Small Economies had been scheduled for 26 March to be followed on the same day by a seminar on the opportunities and challenges for small economies in attracting investments. However, in light of the COVID-19 outbreak and the resulting suspension of all meetings at the WTO, neither the formal meeting of the Dedicated Session, nor the seminar on attracting investments, could be held.

3.3. He had recently met with the Coordinator of the SVEs Group to explore on how to take the work of the Dedicated Session forward in the coming months. Based on that, and other interactions that he had had, he was thinking of convening a meeting of the Dedicated Session after the summer break. During his conversation with the SVEs Coordinator, it had been suggested that one of the issues that could be discussed in that meeting of the Dedicated Session would be the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on the trade of small economies. Another suggestion had been for the Dedicated Session to look at the issue of attracting investments in small economies, and what could be done to facilitate that.

3.4. Those were useful ideas for him to explore, and he would be in touch with the SVE Group Coordinator and other Members as he worked towards the formulation of the agenda for the following meeting of the Dedicated Session.

3.5. The representative of Guatemala, on behalf of the SVEs, noted that the SVEs Group had held consultations with the Chairman and had decided on the organization of a dedicated session for November to discuss the pending issue on investment attraction.

3.6. As specified in the SVEs Group proposal contained in WT/COMTD/SE/W/40, that had been approved by the Committee, Members would be discussing issues such as the relevance of investment attraction for the participation of SVEs in global value chains, key sectors for investment attraction, impact of investment in reducing trade costs, regulatory and policy frameworks and mobilising investments to finance climate change mitigation and adaptation. Discussions would also focus on challenges faced by SVEs in the attraction of investments and on sharing success stories.

3.7. In addition to that topic, the Group had also decided to include an agenda item on the topic of "Effects of COVID-19 Pandemic on Small Economies". It was important to discuss the challenges that small economies were facing at that time and that they would subsequently face as a consequence of the pandemic. The SVEs hoped that the discussion could shed some light on possible support for them in order to overcome the negative effects of the crisis, rebuild their economies and enhance their participation in world trade.

3.8. The representative of Fiji associated with the statements made by the SVEs, the Pacific Group and the ACP. The Chairman of the Work Programme on Small Economies had underlined the various challenges and complexities that small economies faced given the vulnerable and volatile nature of small economies and their susceptibility to threats posed by climate change, natural disasters, coupled by their economic fragility due to reliance to a predictable service sector. A key point of discussion had been the effect on small economies and the global economy of the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.9. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was already taking a heavy toll on Fiji's tourism sector. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization, the pandemic would result in a contraction of the tourism sector by 20% to 30% in 2020. That was a substantial figure. Because of the heavy reliance by small economies on their tourism industry, the consequences were already and would continue to be devastating.

3.10. Small economies heavily relied on foreign tourists and with the existing estimate of an 80% drop in air traffic globally, the impact of COVID-19 related harm was cause for much concern. While many economic sectors were expected to recover once restrictive measures were lifted, the pandemic would have probably had a longer lasting impact on international tourism. That was largely due to reduced consumer confidence and the likelihood of protracted restrictions on the international movement of people. According to the World Tourism Council, the recovery time for visitors to a destination was about 19 months.

3.11. The SVEs were most vulnerable not only because of their high dependence on tourism but also because any shock of such a magnitude was difficult to manage for them. Overall, travel and tourism in those economies generated approximately 30 billion dollars a year. A decline in tourism receipts by 25% would result in a USD 7.4 billion or 7.3% fall in GDP. The COVID-19 pandemic had directly resulted in unprecedented levels of revenue loss without the alternative sources of foreign exchange revenue necessary to service external debt and pay for imports.

3.12. In light of that, it was evident that without international assistance and investment, the economic consequences of the pandemic would be devastating for most, if not all, of the small economies. Members would need to holistically review their stand on small economies and to use the multilateral trading system as a conduit to ease such a burden. Fiji urged Members to support the Work Programme on Small Economies as mandated under the Doha Ministerial Declaration and to provide flexibilities, where relevant, through the multilateral trading system targeting those groups of economies.

3.13. The representative of Saint Lucia, on behalf of CARICOM, said that it was evident from the report that the plans to advance the discussions in the CTD Dedicated Session on the Work Programme on Small Economies had suffered an unfortunate setback due to the onset of the pandemic, particularly as it related to the planned seminars on investment. That notwithstanding, the CARICOM Group was committed and stood ready to reengage as it viewed the advancement of that Work Programme as critical to facilitating the realization of solutions which could have led to a more meaningful participation in global trade.

3.14. The CARICOM Group was encouraged by the willingness of Members to continue to engage in discussions aimed at finding practical solutions to those trade related challenges that hindered their beneficial participation in global trade. It was in that spirit that the CARICOM Group was seeking to identify existing and new priorities that it believed were deserving of Members' consideration for future work under the Work Programme on Small Economies. While CARICOM recognised the unique and unprecedented impact of the pandemic on economic and social structures across the globe, it was evident that those impacts on small and structurally vulnerable economies had been severe and acute and had threatened to rollback many of the developmental gains achieved over the past decades.

3.15. Uniquely, the very time that Members were considering economic and other responses to the pandemic, CARICOM Member States were also preparing to address the 2020 Atlantic Hurricane Season. Severe and frequent hydrometeorological events were the undesirable phenomena that most adversely affected the trading capacity of the Caribbean countries, be it through disruption of the agricultural sector, damage to physical infrastructure, disruptions to existing supply chains or through damage and other disruptions to social systems. It was for that reason that CARICOM Member States believed strongly that time was ripe for Members to build on the findings of the Secretariat's good work on the link between natural disasters and trade by directing more focus and attention to that important topic.

3.16. One way in which Members could complement the ongoing efforts to reduce trade cost for SVEs and better integrate them into global value chains was to expand their conversation and analysis to include those new ways of conducting trade which the pandemic had already brought into sharp focus. In that regard, the CARICOM Group envisaged a work programme that also took into account technology and ITC infrastructure deficits that hindered the capacity of small economies to participate in digital trade.

3.17. The representative of Vanuatu, on behalf of the Pacific Group, welcomed the dedicated session on 2 November focused on investment attraction for SVEs. It had been often highlighted that the Pacific Group consisted of small, open economies, dependent on a narrow range of exports and were highly susceptible to external economic and other shocks like the COVID-19 pandemic. The experience from COVID-19 had reinforced the perception on their vulnerability to depending heavily on imports and on a few key sectors such as tourism and attracting new foreign direct investment, but in particular with tourism having suffered significantly in the last four months as outlined earlier by Fiji.

3.18. The Pacific Group therefore saw investment as a very important catalyst for diversifying its member's economies as a means to strengthen trade capacity and increase their trade including through regional and global value chains. In addition, investment – especially FDI – was an important conduit for new technology and new skills needed to improving trade competitiveness. The Pacific Group further welcomed the inclusion of a new topic on the impact of COVID-19 on SVEs. That would be very useful to better assess the economic and trade impact of COVID-19 on SVEs and also what lessons could have been drawn to prepare for future pandemics.

3.19. Vanuatu was scheduled to graduate from LDC status in December 2020 and the Solomon Islands in 2023. Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands would soon find themselves in another vulnerable group – the SVEs. They would continue to be part of the Small Island Developing States. Graduation from being an LDC would not eliminate the negative effects arising from vulnerabilities from climate change, from vulnerabilities attributed to the smallness of their economies and the rise of natural and emerging disasters, many of which were due to the changing environment and climate.

3.20. The Pacific Group underlined the importance of the Work Programme on Small Economies and reminded Members of the objective that work had been mandated by Paragraph 35 of the Doha Declaration, "to frame responses to the trade-related issues identified for the fuller integration of small, vulnerable economies into the multilateral trading system". Vanuatu urged Members to engage in the CTD in November and to help frame meaningful responses to the challenges faced by SVEs and to better integrate SVEs into the multilateral trading system.

3.21. The representative of Sri Lanka said that her country was not an exception to many of the SVEs that were facing difficulties in rebuilding their economies and trying to integrate into the world trading system. Just before the pandemic, Sri Lanka had also gone through a difficult time the year before in 2019 due to a manmade disaster. The Sri Lankan economy was about USD 84 billion and out of that, 5% was actually found in tourism. That 5% was extremely significant as a lot of communities depended on it as compared to other economic activities. Out of its 22 million population, it was estimated that over 2 million people were directly and indirectly living on tourism, making it inevitable in Sri Lanka's economy.

3.22. Due to the manmade disaster that it had experienced in 2019, Sri Lanka was now ranked as a lower-middle income country from upper-middle country. It demonstrated just how one incident of that magnitude could really turn around a country's economic development backwards. That pandemic had also created another havoc – called the double jeopardy. The tourism sector was also hit by that pandemic and as for the Sri Lankan Tourism Development Authority Data, a decline of 20% of total Tourist Arrivals was evident compared to the first quarter of 2019. Moreover, the decline in tourism revenue for Sri Lanka could be around USD 107 to 319 million according to Asian Development Bank projections.

3.23. All of those demonstrated the fragility of the economies of Sri Lanka and other SVEs. It was not unique to Sri Lanka but to many of the small developing country economies that were Members of the organization. Sri Lanka therefore supported the SVEs' proposal for Members to include an agenda item on the topic of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on small economies. Sri Lanka sought the indulgence of many of its partner countries that were there that day to support that proposal with a view to carrying out some analysis and discussion on that agenda item. Sri Lanka thanked its development partners particularly the European Union, the United States and other developed countries in supporting Sri Lanka in overcoming the crisis particularly in its tourism sector. Their assistance would help Sri Lanka in overcoming those setbacks which it had experienced in 2019 and in 2020.

3.24. The representative of Burkina Faso, on behalf of the C-4, said that the Ministerial Decisions in Bali and in Nairobi on Cotton, especially on DFQF Market Access, the Elimination of Export Subsidies and aid for the Cotton Sector were very important outcomes even though the domestic support pillar still awaited a final decision. In terms of the development aspects of the outcomes of Bali and Nairobi and the mechanism in favour of Cotton, at their meeting on 29 June between the C-4 and DDG Wolff, it had been agreed amongst other things to organise an information session on the impact of COVID-19 in cotton producing countries on 30 July and workshops on textiles and to draw up support mechanisms for cotton producers in LDCs to be submitted to the General Council and to continue consultations with Members of the WTO and the UN on that matter in order to garner support for its adoption on 7 October during the World Cotton Day. They thanked all development partners for their ongoing support and invited them to continue to support LDC Cotton Producing Countries' efforts in their process to integrate into international and into global value chains, especially in the difficult COVID-19 context.

3.25. The representative of Barbados associated with the statements made by the SVEs and the CARICOM Group. Barbados was delighted to be in a position where Members could resume work under the Work Programme on Small Economies and looked forward to their discussions in November on the opportunities faced by small economies as it related to investment attraction. Barbados noted that the discussions on the draft Ministerial Decision on Small Economies would form an essential

part of Members' work as they drew closer to the Ministerial Conference. Barbados however highlighted the critical importance of deliberations in the WTO on the issue of natural disasters and trade that had not yet gained consensus for discussion at the dedicated session on small economies.

3.26. The General Council took note of the report of the Chairman of the CTD and of the statements.

4 TWELFTH SESSION OF THE MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE – DATE AND VENUE

4.1. The Chairman said that under the fourth item, his intention was to provide Members with an update on his ongoing consultations on the date and venue of MC12. As Members recalled, at the May meeting of the General Council, he had noted that the consultations he had undertaken further to the renewed offer by Kazakhstan to host the Conference in June 2021 had shown that all delegations had welcomed the offer, and that no specific objection had been made to holding the Conference in June 2021. Some delegations had also expressed an interest in already setting a specific date. In that respect, a number of options had been subsequently explored, and possible suitable dates had been identified in the third week of June 2021, from 21 to 24 June, specifically, which would have avoided scheduling conflicts with other planned international events.

4.2. Members also recalled that concerns had been however expressed that the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic had remained uncertain, and that any date set at that stage would have necessarily needed to be considered as a "working hypothesis" subject to an ongoing evaluation and review as conditions became clearer closer to the time – possibly later that year, or in early 2021. His recent consultations since the May General Council meeting showed that those concerns still remained, given the persistent uncertainty about the evolution of the pandemic and the different impacts that it was presently having across different regions of the world.

4.3. Therefore, he would continue to consult on the matter in the context of the information he had provided that day in respect of possible suitable dates in June 2021 – that was from 21 to 24 June – as a "working hypothesis", and for the General Council to take a decision at the appropriate time.

4.4. The representative of Brazil took note of the Chairman's report as a working hypothesis. Brazil hoped that MC12 would be held as was originally planned in Kazakhstan by mid-2021. However, Members could not be side-tracked by logistical considerations however important they might be. If the original solution was not possible, Members should set the venue to Geneva and work on the dates provided by the Chairman for mid-2021. That was an opportunity that they could not afford to waste. They should immediately begin to prepare a meaningful package for MC12.

4.5. The representative of Thailand associated with the statement to be made by ASEAN. In light of the economic condition and outlook resulting at that time from the devastating effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, the WTO had a unique and vital role to play in mitigating the negative impacts of the pandemic and expediting economic recovery post COVID-19 through trade. Delivering meaningful outcomes at MC12 would be essential. In that regard, as Members could not agree on the date and venue of MC12, Thailand urged all Members to exercise utmost flexibility so that they could achieve consensus expeditiously.

4.6. The representative of Afghanistan fully supported and thanked the Government of Kazakhstan for its renewed offer to host MC12 tentatively in June 2021. Given the importance of the event and also the fact that for the first time a Ministerial Conference was going to be convened in a country which was an Article XII Member of the WTO and was located in the Central Asian Region, Afghanistan encouraged all Members to extend their support to that proposal.

4.7. The representative of Paraguay thanked Kazakhstan for offering to host MC12 and offered its support to realising MC12 at the tentative dates of 21 to 24 June 2021. The format and the limitation of MC12 should be assessed continuously by Members taking into account that the priorities and the resources of their governments over the next year were going to be focusing on containing the spread of COVID-19 and on economic recovery. Members should not therefore stop assessing the restrictions imposed nationally on movement of persons and on travel. It was important to think about possible contingency plans given the existing uncertainty due to the evolution of the pandemic.

4.8. The representative of Namibia joined other Members in welcoming the offer of the Government of Kazakhstan to host MC12 in June 2021 as a tentative date while observing how the situation of COVID-19 would unfold.

4.9. The representative of Viet Nam, on behalf of ASEAN, said that, as expressed in its statement at the General Council meeting on 29 May, ASEAN welcomed Kazakhstan's offer and supported the setting of the date and venue of MC12. A timely decision would enable Members to chart a definite course towards MC12 and leverage on the momentum in the negotiations. It would also provide Kazakhstan sufficient time to make its preparatory arrangements. ASEAN therefore called for a decision on the matter at the General Council meeting that day.

4.10. The representative of the Republic of Korea said that MC12 was expected to be an important checkpoint for the WTO and its Members. Although the COVID-19 pandemic had prevented it from taking place as previously scheduled, the next Ministerial Conference would be crucial in displaying the political will of the Members to bolster the resilience and relevance of the WTO. It would also be an opportunity to lay the groundwork for longer-term WTO reform. In that regard, Korea stated its firm position that the next Ministerial Conference should be held in 2021. If the situation would not allow for physical meetings, Members could consider alternative formats. On that backdrop, Korea appreciated the offer by Kazakhstan to host MC12 in Nur-Sultan in June 2021 and supported the statement by the Chairman to accept that offer as a working hypothesis. Korea looked forward to working closely with other Members for a fruitful result at MC12.

4.11. The representative of India said that deciding the date of the much delayed Twelfth Ministerial Conference remained a matter of urgent priority for the WTO Membership. India thanked Kazakhstan for its decision to host MC12 in June 2021 at Nur-Sultan despite the continued global uncertainty associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. India had suggested in the General Council meeting on 29 May that the Membership considered accepting that proposal subject to the global public health conditions being suitable for all delegations to participate in the meeting. The certainty of dates for MC12 had the advantage of allowing Members to work collectively towards implementing a work plan with appropriate markers and ambition for outcomes by then. An early decision on that issue would also help mute criticism that the WTO had not held a Ministerial Conference at a critical time. India hoped that there would be clarity on the dates of MC12 soon.

4.12. The representative of the United Kingdom looked forward to working with the Chairman on the matter and thanked Kazakhstan for its offer to host MC12 in June 2021. Members' priority should be to agree on the new dates for MC12 as quickly as possible so that they could focus their attention on the important business of negotiations. The United Kingdom supported the Chairman's working hypothesis for the June 2021 dates. The United Kingdom thought that all Members agreed that they could not afford for MC12 to slip any further. As had been said at the Informal Heads of Delegation meeting on 17 April and the Special General Council Meeting on 15 May, the United Kingdom strongly believed that the COVID-19 crisis should not set back the important work that the WTO had been tasked with. To that end, it had been worth considering how Members could build on milestones in the lead up to MC12 where decisions could be taken. One such moment could be a Special General Council Meeting in December. The United Kingdom looked forward to discussing that idea further with Members.

4.13. The representative of Botswana, on behalf of the African Group, welcomed the offer by the Government of Kazakhstan to host MC12 in June 2021. The African Group was open to June 2021, preferably in the latter part of that month as had been indicated by the Chairman, as a working proposal subject to the evolution of the COVID-19 crisis and the uncertainty everyone agreed it presented. The African Group looked forward to engaging in further discussions on that matter.

4.14. The representative of Peru said that MC12 would undoubtedly be an invaluable opportunity for Members to approve an ambitious raft of measures that would strengthen the multilateral trading system. Peru reaffirmed how important the multilateral trading system was to global prosperity particularly in the post COVID-19 period. Members should continue monitoring the development of the pandemic and the possibilities for all of them to be able to attend an in-person meeting in Nur-Sultan in June 2021. In light of that, Peru agreed with the Chairman's plan to continue monitoring how the situation developed. Members needed to see how the pandemic was going to unfold over the next few months. Peru felt that was the most realistic and transparent option and that would guarantee the participation of as many Members as possible at MC12.

4.15. The representative of South Africa associated with the statement made by the African Group. South Africa appreciated the offer by Kazakhstan. As reflected in the Chairman's report, COVID-19 was still evolving and was affecting different countries at different speeds. It was also likely to affect international travel for some time. South Africa welcomed the Chairman's on-going consultations on the date which would continue to be considered as a working hypothesis. South Africa agreed that it should be continuously reviewed by the General Council based on the evolution of COVID-19. South Africa saw MC12 as an opportunity for the WTO to contribute to inclusive growth and development especially in the context of COVID-19.

4.16. The representative of the Russian Federation welcomed the offer by Kazakhstan to host MC12 in Nur-Sultan in June 2021. It was important for the whole Membership to have in mind specific dates for MC12 as it would be helpful in guiding Members' work in the WTO's substantive agenda. However, it was obvious that the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic remained uncertain. Members had witnessed outbreaks of the virus in different countries and regions of the world, as well as new local outbreaks in countries that had seemingly coped with the first wave. That was why the most reasonable and practical solution would be to keep the third week of June 2021 for MC12 as a working hypothesis as suggested by the Chairman and to revert to that matter in autumn during the next regular meeting of the General Council.

4.17. The representative of Burkina Faso, on behalf of the C-4, thanked Kazakhstan for its willingness to host MC12 in 2021 following its postponement due to COVID-19. The C-4 hoped that the health situation would change significantly by then. MC12 was a very important meeting. The C-4 would therefore join with any consensus that Members reached with regard to the organization of that meeting.

4.18. The representative of Cambodia associated with the statement made by ASEAN. Cambodia fully supported the offer made by Kazakhstan to host MC12 in 2021. Cambodia thanked Kazakhstan for its offer and looked forward to working closely with all Members for the success of MC12.

4.19. The representative of the European Union said that it was important to take a decision as to when MC12 would take place in order to allow the Membership to plan its work accordingly and define the forthcoming milestones between then and MC12. The European Union understood that the current situation was fluid and could change but Members' work could not progress without clear timelines. Members could always reassess the opportunity to hold MC12 in June 2021 if that turned out to be necessary.

4.20. The representative of Nigeria associated with the statements made by the African Group and the ACP and thanked Kazakhstan for its offer to host MC12. Nigeria emphasised that MC12, at that critical time for the WTO, was key to Members given the expectation of achieving fruitful outcomes at MC12 which would restore confidence and trust in the WTO by Members and the rest of the global community. As Members had a lot of hope and targets for MC12, its success would reshape and bring back the efficiency and effectiveness of the functions of the organization. Member should therefore move quickly to ensure that MC12 took place in 2021 if the situation or global crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic would not pose any challenge.

4.21. The representative of Jamaica acknowledged the importance of convening MC12 in order to get Ministers to agree on important decisions as well as to provide mandates and guidance for future work in various areas. Jamaica thanked Kazakhstan for maintaining its offer to host the Ministerial Conference. Jamaica still felt that any date to be agreed must accommodate the concerns of the Membership including the psychological comfort of delegates as a large effect that the virus could have in their capitals. Additionally, it was important that the proposed date afforded Geneva-based delegations adequate time to make sufficient progress in areas in respect of which they were seeking decisions of Ministers. Jamaica therefore took note of the dates that had been proposed by the Chairman as a working hypothesis and looked forward to further consultations with a view at arriving at a date that was acceptable to all.

4.22. The representative of Japan considered that it was highly important to make a decision on the date and venue of MC12 so that the WTO had a clear working hypothesis towards the future. In that regard, Japan welcomed the offer from Kazakhstan to host MC12 in 2021. Deciding on the dates at an early stage was difficult but at the same time Members needed to take into account that normally in June every year, other major international organizations had some general assemblies

or big meetings. In order for the WTO to work very effectively and in a predictable manner, it was highly recommendable to make a decision at an early stage.

4.23. The representative of Ecuador said that over the last few months, Members had been dealing with the beginnings of the COVID-19 pandemic and considered the possibility of holding the Ministerial Conference in Geneva. Ecuador was extremely grateful to Kazakhstan for its availability and its generosity in offering Nur-Sultan as what would be an incredible location for a Ministerial Conference but, as the pandemic unfolded and in light of the economic consequences that countries would have to face over the course of the next few months and even years, Ecuador thought it was important to keep the option of Geneva on the table for 2021. Another option was that that was mentioned by Paraguay – a hybrid meeting. Maybe that was something that could be explored. Holding the event in Geneva would enable many Members to participate as much as possible if it turned out to be impossible to send delegates to Kazakhstan. That could be the case if circumstances remained as difficult as they were at that time.

4.24. The representative of Cameroon supported and welcomed the offer made by Kazakhstan to host MC12 in 2021. Cameroon hoped that that Ministerial Conference would mark a new milestone in the future of the organization and remained open to work constructively with all delegations to make that Conference a success. At the same time, Cameroon drew attention to the need for Members to agree on an exact date at the best time possible in order to facilitate, if needed, the preparations in the capitals and also to be able to see how they could have a fallback position taking into account the evolution of the current situation. In any event, Cameroon remained very confident that the Ministerial Conference would be a success and that Members were working towards that.

4.25. The representative of Kazakhstan said that, despite the current difficult circumstances, Kazakhstan remained confident that Members would continue their efforts and build on the progress made to date to further strengthen the multilateral trading system. Kazakhstan was strongly committed to working constructively with all Members to ensure that the next Ministerial Conference would yield successful outcomes. Kazakhstan greatly appreciated the support of all Members to its proposal to hold the next WTO Ministerial Conference in Kazakhstan in June 2021, as well as to the proposal of the Chairman to hold that Conference on 21 to 24 June 2021 as a working hypothesis.

4.26. The General Council took note of the Chairman's report and of the statements.

5 PROCESS OF APPOINTMENT OF THE NEXT DIRECTOR-GENERAL – STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

5.1. The Chairman recalled that following the announcement made by the Director-General that he would step down on 31 August 2020, and in line with the Procedures for the Appointment of Directors-General contained in WT/L/509, he had notified Members of the start of the process for the appointment of a new Director-General on 8 June in a communication in JOB/GC/230. In line with the Procedures, the deadline for the submission of nominations was 8 July. Eight nominations had been received, and the relevant documentation for each candidate had been circulated as received in documents WT/GC/INF/22, WT/GC/INF/23, WT/GC/INF/24, WT/GC/INF/25, WT/GC/INF/26, WT/GC/INF/27, WT/GC/INF/28 and WT/GC/INF/29. A consolidated list of names of candidates had then been circulated in WT/GC/INF/30. That had concluded Phase 1 of the Appointment Process.

5.2. Members were currently in the second phase of the process – the period for the candidates to make themselves known to Members. In accordance with the Procedures, on 15-17 July, the General Council had held a meeting with the eight candidates. During that meeting, the candidates had been invited to make a brief presentation, including on their vision for the WTO, which had been followed by a question-and-answer period. Their presentations were being circulated in the JOB/GC/ series of documents⁴, and the formal records⁵ of that meeting would be circulated in due course. The special General Council meeting had been one element of the Phase 2 for the candidates "to make themselves known to Members".

⁴ The presentations of the candidates were subsequently circulated in documents JOB/GC/233, JOB/GC/234, JOB/GC/235, JOB/GC/236, JOB/GC/237, JOB/GC/238, JOB/GC/239 and JOB/GC/240.

⁵ The minutes of the special General Council meeting of 15-17 July was subsequently circulated in document WT/GC/M/185.

5.3. In respect of the Appointment Process overall, at the May General Council meeting, given the exceptional circumstances, he had noted that he would be looking at consulting with Members with a view to establishing expedited deadlines for the process, as necessary. That was in line with Paragraph 23 of the Procedures, which provided that in the event of a vacancy in the post, the General Council Chair "may establish expedited deadlines as necessary, in consultation with Members". He had informed all delegations in a communication dated 5 June that he would initiate those consultations and, subsequently, he had conducted consultations in various configurations over a period of three weeks. Following those consultations, he had sent a communication to all Members on 9 July.

5.4. As he had indicated in that communication, in his consultations he had recalled the timelines for the process foreseen in the Procedures, and had sought delegations' views in particular on the start of Phase 3 of the process, which was the period to "narrow down the field of candidates" and arrive at a consensus on the appointment of the next Director-General. He had asked delegations whether the duration of Phase 2 – the phase in which candidates made themselves known to Members – could be expedited, and if so, by how long.

5.5. All delegations that had come forward to consult with him had noted the importance they had attached to transparency and inclusiveness in the process. Given the urgency of the situation, delegations had supported the need to establish expedited deadlines. Therefore, in his communication he had indicated that on the basis of his consultations and having reflected on the views expressed the duration of Phase 2 would be of two months. On that basis, Phase 3 of the process would start on 7 September 2020. According to the Procedures, that Phase should last no longer than two months. Although, it could be concluded within that time should the General Council arrive at a consensus earlier.

5.6. In that Phase, the General Council was directed to proceed, through a process of consultations, to narrow the field of candidates and ultimately to arrive at its choice for appointment. In line with the Procedures, the ultimate aim of the consultation process was to identify the candidate around whom consensus could be built. In order to do that, the Procedures specified that it could be necessary to conduct successive consultations to identify at each stage the candidate or candidates least likely to attract such a consensus.

5.7. He also recalled that the Procedures established that in that Phase the Chair of the General Council should be assisted by the Chairs of the Dispute Settlement Body and the Trade Policy Review Body acting as Facilitators – Ambassador Castillo of Honduras and Ambassador Aspelund of Iceland. In line with the Procedures, their task was to encourage and facilitate the building of consensus among Members and assist them in moving from the initial field of candidates to a final decision on appointment.

5.8. As Members started looking ahead at Phase 3, he thought it would be useful at that point to recall how that Phase had been organised and conducted in the past, and in particular in the appointment process of 2013 in which there had been nine candidates – not dissimilar from the present situation.

5.9. In the 2013 process, based on the preference that had been expressed by Members, three rounds of consultations had been conducted. And it had been agreed that there would only remain two candidates in the final round, in order to facilitate the building of consensus. Given the number of candidates, Members had also mentioned the need to reduce the slate of candidates efficiently, and to know in advance how many candidates would be expected to withdraw after each round. That had led to a shared understanding that four candidates would be expected to withdraw after the first round, and three after the second. So, the profile of candidates across the rounds had been nine-five-two – with then the name of the candidate most likely to attract consensus being recommended to the General Council for appointment.

5.10. Because the aim of the process was building consensus, the question to which Members had been expected to respond in the consultations had been: "What are your preferences?" That had meant more than one, that was multiple preferences without ranking and the then General Council Chair had clarified that no negative preferences could be expressed. In light of the number of candidates, delegations had been urged to come forward with four preferences in the first round of consultations and two preferences in the second round.

5.11. All Heads of Delegation had been consulted in their capacity as representatives of individual Members, and consultations had taken place on a "confessional" basis. The Chair and both Facilitators – and only them – had been present during all consultations, and the positions and views expressed by Members had been treated in the strictest confidence, with no information or other forms of indications of individual Members' specific preferences being made available by the Chair and the Facilitators to other Members, to the candidates or to the public at large.

5.12. The Chair and the Facilitators, in assessing the information received and reporting to Members, had been guided by the elements set out in Paragraph 17 of the Procedures, which stated: "The Chair, with the assistance of the facilitators, shall consult all Members, including non-resident Members, in order to assess their preferences and the breadth of support for each candidate." On the specific aspect of the "breadth of support", the then General Council Chair had explained as earlier in 2005 that, "As reflected in past decisions and in experience, and based on common sense, 'breadth of support' means the larger membership."

5.13. And finally, in previous processes, and in line with Paragraph 18 of the Procedures which stated that "The outcome of the consultations shall be reported to the membership at each stage", the outcome of each round of consultations had been reported to all Members at open-ended meetings of Heads of Delegation which had been held immediately following the conclusion of each round of consultations – so as to ensure transparency, inclusiveness and full participation in every step of the process.

5.14. He apologised for the rather long overview, but he said he would recall those elements at that point so that all delegations were clear on what had been done in 2013. And again, given that Members were presently in a not dissimilar situation in respect of the number of candidates, he considered that it would be useful to be aware of that past practice that Members could all reflect upon and that could usefully guide them as they moved forward towards Phase 3 of the Appointment Process. In that respect, he in consultation with the Facilitators would be looking at engaging with Members in the next few days, including through an Open-Ended Informal Meeting to be convened shortly with the intention that before the end of the month, the details for the organization and conduct of Phase 3 would be known to all Members and all candidates.⁶

5.15. He stressed again that, in line with Paragraph 1 of the Procedures, the process had to be guided by the best interests of the organization, respect for the dignity of the candidates and the Members nominating them, and by full transparency and inclusiveness at all stages. He did not expect a lengthy discussion on the matter that day and as he had said, he intended to convene an Informal Open-Ended on the issue shortly.

5.16. The representative of the Philippines associated with the statement to be made by ASEAN. The Philippines commended the Chairman for his steady leadership and management of the initial phases of the Selection Process for the next Director-General. The Philippines joined others in expressing its deep appreciation for the hard work of the Chairman and the Secretariat and the Troika Committee that would be making the necessary preparations for the coming process.

5.17. The Philippines also expressed its gratefulness for the three-day special General Council meeting which had been particularly important and efficient in the face of the practical difficulties and risks posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result of those efforts, the entire Membership had been given the unique opportunity of interacting live and in person with the eight candidates for Director-General.

5.18. The challenges that the next Director-General would face were profoundly difficult and overwhelming. He or she would certainly be tested in the crucible of multilateral trade negotiations, whether in that grand room or in the small meeting rooms and narrow corridors of the Centre William Rappard. The new Director-General should possess the qualities, temperament and the fortitude necessary to lead the WTO under conditions of global and existential crisis. The Philippines was confident that the WTO would surely be in competent hands with whomsoever the Members selected by consensus.

⁶ The Chair convened Informal Open-Ended HODs meetings on 28 and 31 July. Following the discussion on 28 July, the Chairman announced on 31 July the modalities for the Phase 3 of the DG Appointment Process. The Chair's statement was circulated in JOB/GC/243.

5.19. The representative of Cambodia, intervening under Items 5 and 6, associated with the statement to be made by ASEAN. Cambodia thanked the Chairman for his report and tireless efforts in leading the DG Selection Process in a transparent and inclusive manner. Cambodia welcomed the eight candidates and congratulated them on their good presentation and responses to Members' questions at the Special Session of the General Council the previous week. With regard to the process, Cambodia supported the Chairman's proposal as had been mentioned in the communication dated 9 July to expedite the process in Phase 2 and to narrow the field of candidates in Phase 3. On the designation of an Acting Director-General, Cambodia thanked the Chairman for his leadership and for consulting its group coordinator. Cambodia welcomed the proposal to designate an Acting Director-General who was involved, responsible and competent.

5.20. The representative of Paraguay, intervening under Items 5 and 6, commended the Chairman for his efforts in accelerating the process for the selection and appointment of the new Director-General and congratulated him for organising the special General Council meeting the previous week. That exercise allowed Members to get to know the candidates better. Paraguay agreed with the need to have those deadlines and would like to show its support for the Phases proposed as well as the need to appoint an Acting Director-General during the interim period.

5.21. The representative of Viet Nam, on behalf of ASEAN, intervening under Items 5 and 6, noted that the successful series of General Council meetings the previous week had given Members the opportunity to meet and interact with the eight distinguished Director-General candidates. ASEAN thanked the Chairman for his communication conveyed on 9 July and for his statement that day informing Members of the process of DG appointment with expedited deadlines. Given the urgency of having the next Director-General in office, ASEAN supported the Chairman's proposal for Phase 2 of the Appointment Process to be expedited to a duration of two months. Over the past two weeks, ASEAN delegations had had the privilege of meeting a few of the Director-General candidates. ASEAN encouraged all DG candidates to continue in their outreach efforts to enable Members to get to know them better.

5.22. In connection with the appointment process, ASEAN noted that an Acting Director-General should be designated at the current General Council meeting to ensure the smooth operation of the WTO from 1 September until the new Director-General could take office. As such, ASEAN supported a decision based on document WT/L/509 paragraphs 1, 2 and 23.

5.23. On behalf of Viet Nam, intervening under Items 5 and 6, said that, regarding Phase 3 of the Appointment Process to establish consensus on the best candidates for the position of Director-General of the WTO without prejudice to the modalities of appointment to be agreed by Members, Viet Nam had high expectations on the professional and on the personal attributes of the next Director-General. That included competence; political experience; a good network with Members' capitals, international business and organizations; profound understanding of the WTO negotiating process and devotion to the multilateral trading system. Viet Nam stood ready to work with other Members to achieve consensus based on those qualifications. The process should be conducted in a transparent and inclusive manner.

5.24. On the designation of an Acting Director-General, Viet Nam supported a decision based on competence, availability and willingness of the Director-General to oversee the Secretariat during the transition period.

5.25. The representative of the United Kingdom placed on record the United Kingdom's strong support to the Chairman's efforts and those of his co-facilitators to run consultations in line with expedited deadlines as necessary to the Selection Process. The United Kingdom thanked the Chairman for setting out the process in 2013 so clearly that day and looked forward to engaging with him in the coming days to finalise the necessary arrangements. The United Kingdom also thanked the Chairman and the Secretariat for the excellent organization for the process the previous week which had provided the candidates with the opportunity to present their credentials to the Membership in an inclusive and transparent manner.

5.26. The United Kingdom had been delighted to nominate Dr. Liam Fox for the position of the next Director-General of the WTO. Dr. Fox had proven himself a passionate advocate of the WTO's rules-based trading system with the case of experience in the United Kingdom and global politics having been both Cabinet Minister and Secretary of State to International Trade. He was equipped to both

lead and modernise the organization. Dr. Fox was a strong proponent of trade as a key to global prosperity and security and was well placed to ensure that the benefit of free trade truly worked for all Members and all systems.

5.27. The representative of Nigeria associated with the statements to be made by the African Group and the ACP. Nigeria thanked the Chairman for the update report on the DG Selection Process currently on-going and commended him and the Secretariat for the manner that Phase 1 and the special General Council meeting held on 15-17 July had been conducted during which all the candidates had presented themselves to Members. Nigeria thanked the Chairman for sharing past practice on the selection of candidates by Members which would assist and guide Members in taking a decision on the way the current DG Selection Process would be conducted.

5.28. The representative of India appreciated the efforts of the Chairman in conducting the DG Selection Process in an open, transparent and efficient manner so far. The Chairman had wasted no time in announcing the commencement of the process and had succeeded in establishing an expedited timeline for Phase 2 of the process in consultation with Members. India hoped that during Phase 3 which had been the most crucial phase in the whole process, the Chairman and the co-facilitators alike would ensure that it remained a fully transparent and inclusive process, in full conformity with the procedures outlined in document WT/L/509. India would support the Chairman's efforts towards that end. In that regard, India looked forward to understanding the process that he and the co-facilitators would follow during Phase 3 so that Members were fully aware and were prepared for handling the various rounds of that phase.

5.29. India reiterated the need for completing the selection process as early as possible so that the WTO was not devoid of leadership during that critical period. Therefore, India fully supported the Chairman's efforts in that direction and hoped that the Membership would also work towards that objective. India hoped that the smooth DG Selection Process would herald better days ahead for the WTO and looked forward to actively participating in that process.

5.30. The representative of Kenya commended the Chairman for initiating the process of Appointment of the Next Director-General in earnest following the announcement by the Director-General of his intention to step down on 31 August 2020. Kenya was cognizant of the extraordinary situation in which the Chairman had to conduct the process and assured him of its full support throughout the process. Kenya was content with the manner in which the Chairman was carrying out the exercise and believed it would not only be concluded within the set timelines but would also result in the selection of the most ideal candidate for the appointment as the next Director-General to steer the esteemed organization to greater heights.

5.31. The multilateral trading system was at its twilight and urgently required Members to collectively make concerted efforts to revive it. The office of the Director-General was cardinal in the revival process of the organization. Therefore, it would be prudent for Members to give top priority to the best interest of the organization in the selection of the new Director-General. Kenya also associated with the statement to be made by the African Group.

5.32. The representative of Botswana, on behalf of the African Group, commended the Chairman for the excellent arrangement he had put in place for the special General Council meeting at which the candidates for the position of Director-General of the organization had been able to make their presentations. The African Group congratulated the candidates on their nominations and thanked them for their presentations. The African Group appreciated the Chairman's informative report which had shed light on the next phase of the DG Selection Process. The African Group also thanked him for the continuous efforts he had made to consult Members on the issue.

5.33. The African Group emphasised the importance of ensuring that Phase 3 of the DG Selection Process was underpinned by a transparent, inclusive and participatory process. In that context, the African Group recalled its previous statement on the matter at the General Council meeting on 29 May in which the African Group had brought to light the importance of those principles as they had given Members the assurance that due process was being followed in line with the procedures. And that at all times, Members knew what to expect throughout the Selection Process. An inclusive and transparent process was critical to ensure that the DG Selection Process as well as the incoming Director-General enjoyed the trust and confidence of all Members and parties involved.

5.34. The African Group would like to remind Ambassador Castillo and Ambassador Aspelund of the great responsibility that the Membership had entrusted in them in their respective roles as Chairpersons of the Dispute Settlement Body and the Trade Policy Review Body during Phase 3 of the DG Selection Process. The African Group looked forward to engaging in further consultations on the matter.

5.35. The representative of Malaysia, intervening under Items 5 and 6, commended Ambassador Walker for his leadership in conducting an excellent engagement session with all the DG candidates the previous week. Indeed, the session had provided Members with the opportunity to exchange views with candidates as well as to understand their visions and perspectives on key WTO issues. Malaysia hoped that Phase 3 of the DG Selection Process would be conducted in a transparent and inclusive manner in accordance with the relevant procedures in document WT/L/509. Malaysia welcomed the ongoing process of appointing an Acting Director-General, which should be done as smoothly as possible, during the transition period from 1 September 2020 until the new Director-General would assume office.

5.36. The representative of Indonesia associated with the statement made by ASEAN. Indonesia appreciated the efforts of the Chairman for organising the special General Council meeting to meet and interact with all DG candidates in person. The expedited deadlines for the DG Selection Process emphasised the urgency of having the next Director-General at the soonest possible time. For the sake of transparency, Indonesia supported the Chairman's comments and looked forward to having some guidance as to how the Troika of the three Selection Committee members led by the Chairman would gradually narrow down the candidates in each round.

5.37. The representative of Haiti congratulated the Chairman on his engagement and on his communication with regard to the DG Selection Process. In that connection, Haiti supported the Chairman's proposal with regard to the second and third phases. Haiti hoped that the process would be conducted in an inclusive, transparent and participative manner.

5.38. The representative of South Africa associated with the statement made by the African Group. The next Director-General was expected to lead an institution that was facing an existential crisis. The situation was further exacerbated by COVID-19 which was taking place at a time when the global economy had been in a period of low growth even before COVID-19. The World Bank stated in its June 2020 Global Economic Prospects Report that the global economy would shrink by 5.2% in 2020. That would represent the deepest recession since the Second World War.

5.39. The WTO as a Member-driven institution had a role to play to promote economic recovery, build resilience both nationally and internationally and promote inclusive growth and development. The Director-General played a facilitative role and as the Chair of the TNC played a role in assisting the Membership to focus discussions on mandated issues so as to have a fair, development-oriented rules-based multilateral trading system especially in the context of COVID-19. The process should be inclusive and transparent and should facilitate fair and effective participation of all.

5.40. The representative of Peru, intervening under Items 5 and 6, was grateful to the Chairman and the Secretariat for having organised the excellent process for selecting the next Director-General. The process had gone very well the previous week. Peru supported the proposal that the Chairman had presented as a means of moving forward expeditiously and smoothly with the Selection Process. That would enable the organization to agree on a new Director-General as quickly as possible based on transparency and inclusiveness. Peru was willing to work with the new Director-General from the first day of her or his tenure to assist her or him in enabling the Membership and the organization to rise to the challenges that they were all currently facing. Peru felt it was appropriate to resolve the issue of the Acting Director-General during the current meeting and as quickly as possible.

5.41. The representative of Cameroon, intervening under Items 5 and 6, took note of the report that the Chairman had presented under that item and applauded him for his efforts in conducting the DG Selection Process. Cameroon welcomed the clarification that the Chairman had given Members on the process going forward and had taken note of the relevant details. As Cameroon had previously stated, transparency, inclusiveness and clarity were pivotal if Members were to ensure that the new Director-General was fully legitimate in her or his new function. Cameroon drew everyone's attention to how important it was for the organization to ensure diversity and

representation in line with Paragraph 13 of the Rules of Procedure. Cameroon therefore hoped that the nominations from Africa would be given particular attention. Cameroon trusted that the process would be conducted in a transparent and inclusive manner and could move the organization forward.

5.42. Concerning the appointment of an Acting Director-General, Cameroon felt that continuity of service called upon all Members to think about that carefully and to move forward in the right direction. Undoubtedly, all Members knew of the importance of the issue and in dealing with the matter, Cameroon trusted that the Chairman and the entire Membership would keep the best interests of the organization in mind. To that end, Cameroon assured the Chairman of its full support.

5.43. The representative of Brazil said that Members needed to keep the expedited DG Selection Process on track and to conclude it before November. Members should be able to select the new Director-General as soon as possible and with her or his indispensable assistance to focus on the lead up to the next Ministerial Conference. That was a critical time for the organization and the multilateral trading system. Members needed to have enough time, energy and guidance to prepare the negotiating package for MC12.

5.44. The representative of Egypt associated with the statement made by the African Group and expressed deep appreciation to the Chairman for his efforts in organising the special General Council meeting the previous week and for his continuous efforts with the Selection Process of the Director-General on expedited deadlines in a transparent and inclusive manner.

5.45. The representative of Chad, on behalf of the LDC Group, congratulated the Chairman for his commitment and his efforts concerning the DG Selection Process. The LDC Group thanked the Chairman particularly for the efficiency with which he was managing the process. The LDC Group considered the process very important and a key part of the functioning of the WTO as a whole. For the LDC Group, transparency, inclusiveness and participation were key tools as they would enable Members to see the process through its successful conclusion.

5.46. The representative of Jamaica commended the Chairman on the manner in which the process had been unfolding so far. Jamaica had taken note of the details of the different phases and the expectations for the third phase. Jamaica also took careful note of the Chairman's emphasis on consultations with all Members. Like others, transparency and inclusiveness were important in that very serious process of choosing the next Director-General. Jamaica therefore looked forward to being a part of the consultation process moving ahead.

5.47. The Chairman said that, as he had indicated, he intended to convene an Informal Open-Ended meeting on the matter regarding the details for the organization and conduct of Phase 3. He would be convening that meeting shortly.⁷

5.48. The General Council took note of the Chairman's report and of the statements.

6 DESIGNATION OF ACTING DIRECTOR-GENERAL

6.1. The Chairman noted that the item was directly related to the previous one. Paragraph 23 of the Procedures in WT/L/509 established that "in the event of a vacancy in the post of Director-General, the General Council shall designate one of the existing Deputy Directors-General to serve as Acting Director-General until the appointment of a new Director-General". As he had noted under the previous item, Members would start Phase 3 of the process on 7 September. With the outgoing Director-General leaving at the end of August, the position of Director-General would be vacant as of 1 September. According to the Procedures, it was therefore necessary for the General Council to designate an Acting Director-General until the new one was appointed.

6.2. In that respect, as he had indicated at the conclusion of the special General Council meeting on 17 July, he had been engaging with delegations and group coordinators prior to the General Council meeting. In those consultations, he had indicated that, consistent with the language of WT/L/509, he saw the designation of an Acting Director-General very much as a housekeeping

⁷ See footnote 6.

matter to facilitate the continued running of the organization while they as Members focused on finalising the process of Appointment of a new Director-General.

6.3. The period Members were looking at from 1 September until the Appointment of a new Director-General was a limited one. Any Deputy Director-General designated as the Acting Director-General would be undertaking such responsibility in addition to their existing roles for which Members should all be grateful. All four Deputy Directors-General had confirmed to him that they would be continuing to fully discharge their existing responsibilities and that they would support whomever Members designated as the Acting Director-General. He expressed his gratitude for this on the General Council's behalf.

6.4. As the time ahead of that day's meeting had been limited, it had been suggested to him in his consultations that a little more time would be useful in reaching a decision on the designation and he could fully appreciate that. He therefore proposed to suspend consideration of the agenda item in order to consult further with a view to making the required designation within the coming days. He would then reconvene the General Council at the appropriate moment to conclude consideration of the item and would be grateful for Members' understanding as that could be at short notice.

6.5. The General Council took note of the Chairman's report and suspended the consideration of the item.

6.6. At the resumption of the meeting on 31 July, the Chairman recalled that Paragraph 23 of the Procedures in WT/L/509 established that "in the event of a vacancy in the post of Director-General, the General Council shall designate one of the existing Deputy Directors-General to serve as Acting Director-General, until the appointment of a new Director-General".

6.7. With the outgoing Director-General leaving at the end of August, the position of Director-General would be vacant as of 1 September. According to the Procedures, therefore, the General Council would need to designate an Acting Director-General until the new Director-General was appointed.

6.8. Members would recall that, at the General Council meeting the previous week, he had indicated that he had been engaging with delegations and group coordinators in that respect. He had also indicated that – consistent with the language of WT/L/509 – he had seen the designation of an Acting Director-General very much as a housekeeping matter to facilitate the continued running of the organization while they as Members focused on the process of Appointment of a new Director-General – which was what they as Members were primarily required to focus on. In suspending the item, he had noted that a little more time had been needed for additional consultations on the matter.

6.9. He had since continued to engage with Members and through and with group coordinators. Given that Members were already well advanced in the particular process of Appointment of a new Director-General that they were dealing with in 2020, the period Members were looking at from 1 September until the Appointment a new Director-General was a limited one. That was a specific situation that Members were witnessing at that point in time, and in the current circumstances. As such, the actions that Members would take that day should not be considered as creating a precedent for future situations where the designation of an Acting Director-General could be taking place in entirely different circumstances.

6.10. He once again recalled that, in line with Paragraph 1 of the Procedures, the process was directed towards the best interests of the organization, and guided by the fundamental principles of respect and dignity, transparency and inclusiveness. And he trusted that everybody would agree that it was important that those guiding principles also applied to the respect and dignity of the Deputy Directors-General.

6.11. He said that, in his consultations, he had heard a range of different criteria. He had heard different reasons for the appointment of one or other amongst the Deputy Directors-General. Some of the criteria advanced by delegations had been based on geography which was irrelevant in a process concerned with persons of exclusively international character – and he was quoting there from Article IV.6 of the Marrakesh Agreement Establishing the WTO. Geography could be relevant to Members, when Members were thinking from a Member's point of view, but they were not in the

process of designating an Acting Director-General where they were dealing with persons who were exclusively of an international character.

6.12. Other criteria he had heard had been based on seniority or on the attributions or tasks performed by each Deputy Director-General. None of the criteria and reasons that he had heard to appoint one or any of the Deputy Directors-General were based on rules or established procedures. What they were guided to do as Members, including when considering the designation process, was to be taking into account and be guided by the best interests of the organization and to follow the principles of dignity, respect, transparency and inclusiveness. He said that he was being as transparent, as inclusive with Members as he thought it was appropriate to be in the context of a formal meeting.

6.13. That was the basis for the solution that was being proposed that day in the current 2020 circumstances of a very limited period of time. So, what he was proposing was that Members proceeded according to an understanding. That understanding had a number of common elements which applied and would apply however they resolved the matter. Those were:

- a. "This understanding applies for the period between 1st September 2020 and the date of formal appointment of the new Director-General.
- b. No structural changes will be made to the Secretariat during this period.
- c. All four Deputy Directors-General will continue to fully discharge their existing responsibilities in respect of administration within the Secretariat; engaging with external constituencies/stakeholders as currently; and overseeing their respective parts of the Secretariat in respect of serving Members' regular work and areas of negotiation as appropriate. They will also continue to maintain close contact with each other in the exercise of their respective responsibilities on behalf of the organization.
- d. And, reflecting the existing and appropriate boundaries of governance, the Deputy Directors-General will undertake these responsibilities in close consultation with Members, where relevant, as represented by the General Council Chair."

6.14. Those were the common elements of an understanding that he was proposing that Members took to that matter. He asked Members if he could take that that was acceptable as the understanding of the common elements that would apply throughout the period of time between 1 September and the formal appointment of the new Director-General. To clarify, the understanding would apply from that point hence and it would apply throughout the period he had specified. Should the Membership wish to come back to the matter of specific designation of one or any of the Deputy Directors-General on top of that understanding then he remained listening to delegations and he would come back to Members with that specific element again. But that common understanding would apply throughout the period that he had specified.

6.15. The General Council so agreed.

6.16. The Director-General said he had taken note of the Chairman's statement. It was disappointing that Members had not been able to agree on an Acting Director-General as had been provided for in the Procedures for the Appointment of Directors-General. From his perspective, that would have been the best outcome. He understood, from what the Chairman had said, that the conversation was still open so Members could still come back to that. But he nevertheless took note of Members' regarding the interim administrative arrangements that would operate at the WTO between his departure at the end of August and the entry into office of his successor. For his part, he would do everything he could over the month ahead to ensure that the administration was handed over in the best possible shape with as many issues dealt with as possible.

6.17. During the interim period, the four DDGs, as Members had decided, would continue to carry out their current responsibilities with oversight over the same issues and Secretariat divisions that they had that day. He noted that each of the DDGs brought the wealth of experience and skill to their respective roles. For seven years, three in the case of DDG Wolff, he had worked closely with them and had seen them engaged with both Members and the wider public. And he had every confidence in their judgment and their professionalism. Still, having said all that, as Members knew,

some administrative actions could only be taken by the Director-General himself and the provisions did not always allow for delegation of authority for those DG-specific acts.

6.18. He would nonetheless be talking to the DDGs and the Directors in charge of administration to try to map out special DG-specific circumstances that were likely to occur, if any, during the transition period and he would try to figure out solutions that were as straight-forward as possible. It could well be the case that some unforeseen situation developed or where the rules did absolutely require action by the Director-General and no one else – and in those instances, the DDGs, as Members had just decided would be consulting with Members through the Chairman. The DDGs and he would do their very best so that the arrangement would work smoothly during the short period after his departure on 31 August and until the new Director-General took office.

6.19. He noticed though that the Chairman had mentioned the period as between 1 September and the date of formal appointment of the new Director-General. He wanted to clarify that he had understood "formal appointment" to mean the date when the new Director-General would take office and not the moment when she or he would be selected. How short that period would turn out to be was of course in the hands of Members. He would do his very best to ensure that it ran smoothly.

6.20. The Chairman said that, concerning the point that the Director-General had mentioned about the date of formal appointment, that was something that needed to be worked out with the new Director-General as a practical matter. The mandate of the appointment was something which was discussed with Members.

6.21. The General Council took note of the statements.

7 TURKMENISTAN – REQUEST FOR OBSERVER STATUS (WT/L/1090)

7.1. The Chairman drew attention to the communication from Turkmenistan requesting observer status in the General Council and its subsidiary bodies circulated in document WT/L/1090, in which Turkmenistan had indicated its intention to apply for accession to the WTO Agreement and had provided a brief description of its economy and foreign trade regime, in accordance with the guidelines for observer status for governments in the WTO (WT/L/161, Annex 2).

7.2. In that regard, at the May General Council meeting, he had announced that he would begin consultations on the matter. Further to subsequent engagement with a number of delegations, he had sent a communication on 25 June to suggest that, if no objections or reservations had been received by 3 July, the General Council would consider the request for observer status at its next regular meeting.

7.3. As he had not received any objections, he understood that the General Council could be in a position to take action on the matter. Unless any delegation wished to intervene at that point, he therefore proposed that the General Council agreed to the request to grant Turkmenistan Observer Status.

7.4. The General Council so agreed.

7.5. H.E. Atageldi Haljanov, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Turkmenistan in Geneva, speaking as an Observer, noted that the growing trends of economic globalization in the modern world had set for Turkmenistan the task to actively integrate into the world economy and the system of international economic relations. Achievement of those tasks was possible through the use of a platform for regulating and coordinating the international movement of goods and services such as the World Trade Organization. For that very reason, at the beginning of 2013, Turkmenistan had expressed its interest in considering the possibility of joining the WTO.

7.6. The process of studying Turkmenistan's accession to the WTO had therefore started on 24 January 2013 with the creation of the Special Governmental Commission on Studying Issues on Turkmenistan's Accession to the WTO. Over a span of time, that Governmental Commission had considered in detail all aspects of interaction with the WTO to see if it would meet the national interests of Turkmenistan. It had also studied the experience of other countries that had acceded to the WTO including the multilateral trade agreements, the GATT, the TRIMs Agreement, the

Agreement on Import Licensing Procedures, the Agreement on Safeguards, the GATS, the TRIPS Agreement, Rules and Procedures on DSU, Trade Policy Review and many other aspects.

7.7. In order to intensify the work and to give it a new impetus in that direction, on 15 July 2019, the composition of the delegation of the Governmental Commission had been modified which had brought together representatives from the key governmental agencies that were in charge of the country's foreign and economic activities. The Commission had conducted several meetings with its new Members. Also, on 11 August 2019, within the framework of the First Caspian Economic Forum, representatives of the WTO headed by the Director of the Accessions Division had organised a side-event called "National Seminar on Accession to the WTO".

7.8. Moreover, in order to conduct bilateral consultations with the administration of the WTO on concrete steps of Turkmenistan's accession, in 2019, the Commission had sent the Executive Secretary of the Commission to Geneva. The outcomes of the two recent meetings of the Governmental Commission held on 14 April and 4 May had been that the Commission had come into conclusion that Turkmenistan's participation as an Observer would contribute to the dynamic development of the national economy. Further, on 15 May, the President of Turkmenistan had approved the decision of the Governmental Commission and had signed the resolution entitled "Accession of Turkmenistan to the WTO as an Observer". According to that document, Turkmenistan had sent the application letter to join as an Observer addressed to the Director-General along with the document entitled "Overview of Economic Policy and Trade-Related Regime of Turkmenistan".

7.9. He brought to Members' attention that the process of accession of Turkmenistan had started with the implementation of the policy of reviewing its foreign economic activity. An additional impetus towards the realization of the sound work in that direction was given by the programme for the development of Turkmenistan Foreign Economic Activities for 2020 and 2025. The document included the set of measures for the effective use of market mechanisms to attract foreign investments in various industries of Turkmenistan, diversify export-oriented production and Turkmenistan's rapid industrialization.

7.10. Three main factors on which accession was beneficial for Turkmenistan included: first, the integration and accession of Turkmenistan to international economic structures would enable the country to fully strengthen its position in foreign trade as well as to carry out the comprehensive beneficial cooperation. Second, Turkmenistan paid great attention to attracting investments from abroad and developing trade relations with other countries of the world. Accession provided guarantees and transparency for investors and the country's trading partners. Third, accession would allow Turkmenistan to move forward its position on commercial issues and find their rapid solutions. Turkmenistan's work would be aimed at an all-around study of present trade rules. It would work on development of new principles and mechanisms that would meet modern realities and challenges.

7.11. Considering the possibility of Turkmenistan's participation in the activities of the World Trade Organization, studying international experience in matters related to adaptation and negotiation on accession to the WTO, its legal framework and adoption of the obligations and liberalization of the foreign trade regime taking into account national interest was of particular relevance and of great practical importance for Turkmenistan. In that regard, Turkmenistan was looking forward to receiving support from the Membership on that matter. Turkmenistan hoped that the work of the current meeting of the General Council would be crowned with success.

7.12. The representative of Afghanistan welcomed and praised the submission of the application for Observer Status in the General Council of the WTO and its Subsidiary Bodies by Turkmenistan. Afghanistan was encouraged that day upon witnessing the consent expressed by Members to grant Turkmenistan Observer Status. Afghanistan congratulated Ambassador Atageldi Haljanov on that occasion.

7.13. As Turkmenistan's immediate neighbour and so far the latest Member of the WTO, Afghanistan was happy to note that the Government of Turkmenistan intended to initiate negotiations for accession to the WTO within five years and looked at the Observer Status as a tool for their government to familiarise with the WTO rules and procedures and to prepare for initiation of the accession negotiations. Afghanistan had the same strategy which had turned out to be very helpful. Afghanistan therefore strongly supported the request made by Turkmenistan and was happy to note

that an interim Ministerial Commission had been established to examine issues related to Turkmenistan's possible accession to the WTO which demonstrated its seriousness to the issue.

7.14. Turkmenistan bordered Afghanistan to the southeast and was a supportive and friendly neighbour. Afghanistan was expected to play an important role in providing a transit corridor connecting Turkmenistan, rich in natural resources mainly oil and gas, to South Asia. Given the importance of trade in Turkmenistan's economy with a value equal to 40% of its GDP, accession to the WTO would therefore contribute in the expansion of trade and transit and ultimately regional cooperation in Central and South Asia.

7.15. Turkmenistan was one of the top ten trading partners of Afghanistan. The Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India Gas Pipeline (TAPI) which would transport natural gas from the Galkynysh gas field in Turkmenistan through Afghanistan to Pakistan and then to India was a remarkable example of the cooperation potential that their countries had in the region. Afghanistan was sure that as soon as Turkmenistan joined the WTO, its cooperation would go further. In wishing Turkmenistan all the best, Afghanistan assured Turkmenistan that it could count on Afghanistan's full support.

7.16. The representative of Panama, on behalf of Article XII Members, welcomed Turkmenistan's application for Membership to the WTO and wished the delegation of Turkmenistan an expedited and successful accession negotiating process. MC12 in Kazakhstan would be the first Ministerial Conference hosted by one of the Article XII Members and the Article XII Members hoped that that milestone could result in the accession of more than one new Member to the organization.

7.17. The representative of Mongolia, on behalf of the LLDCs, said that participation of LLDCs in global trade was below 1%. One-third of the population of the LLDCs were still living in extreme poverty. On average, LLDCs continued to pay more than double in transport costs compared to their transit neighbours. To meaningfully integrate them into the multilateral trading system was essential. In that regard, the LLDCs welcomed the request of the Government of Turkmenistan for Observer Status in the General Council and its subsidiary bodies which was the very first step by the Government of Turkmenistan towards its accession to the WTO. Turkmenistan's future accession to the WTO would lend an important voice on the issue of common concern to the developing countries particularly the LLDCs. Therefore, the LLDCs that were Members of the WTO expressed their full support to the Government of Turkmenistan.

7.18. The representative of Tajikistan welcomed Turkmenistan's application for the individual Membership to the WTO and extended warm congratulations for other Observers and wished them pleasant and smooth accession process to the WTO. Tajikistan associated with the statements made by the LLDCs and the Article XII Members. Accession to the WTO was an important step towards the expansion of trade cooperation and was an important achievement for the multilateral trading system. Tajikistan and Turkmenistan shared close economic ties. Tajikistan was interested in developing mutually beneficial relations with Turkmenistan within the framework of the WTO. Tajikistan commended the efforts of the Government of Turkmenistan to become an Observer and looked forward to receiving the documentations it would put forward for further consideration. Tajikistan highly appreciated the strong commitment of Turkmenistan to become a full-fledged Member of the WTO and wished Turkmenistan a successful accession process to the WTO.

7.19. The representative of Ukraine extended warm words and appreciation to the delegation of Turkmenistan. Ukraine and Turkmenistan had a long-standing, friendly relation and economic cooperation. Ukraine wished the delegation of Turkmenistan a successful negotiation process for its accession to the WTO and believed that it would help further the country's economic development.

7.20. The representative of Turkey welcomed Turkmenistan's observer status to the General Council. Turkey considered that as an important step for Turkmenistan in helping it craft its trade policies as had been implied in its communication by being fully aware of the work and discussions of the WTO. Turkey also saw the request as a reflection of Turkmenistan's valuing of the rules-based multilateral trading system. Any effort to augment the inclusive nature of the organization would contribute to the achievement of its goals and enhance the multilateral trading system.

7.21. The representative of India welcomed Turkmenistan as an Observer at the WTO and extended warm welcome to the delegation of Turkmenistan. India enjoyed friendly and cordial relations with

Turkmenistan which was an important trade and investment partner of India in the Central Asian region. India hoped that the WTO Observer Status would help Turkmenistan accelerate its accessions process to become a full Member of the organization to reap the full benefits of the multilateral trading system as well as the shared objective of both their countries to enhance prosperity of their people.

7.22. The representative of the Kyrgyz Republic noted that the Kyrgyz Republic and the Republic of Turkmenistan had built an especially warm relationship and their mutual cooperation was developing in a spirit of sincere friendship and mutual respect as well as on the basis of common history, culture and mutual values. In August 2018, the State visit of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, H.E. Sooronbay Jeenbekov, to Turkmenistan had taken place for the first time during which a solid package of bilateral documents in the political, trade, economic, cultural and humanitarian spheres had been signed. The Heads of the two States had signed the Declaration on Strategic Partnership, Strengthening Friendship and Trust between the Kyrgyz Republic and Turkmenistan which had brought cooperation between the countries for a higher level. That had opened a new page in their bilateral relations.

7.23. The Republic of Turkmenistan was among the important trading partners of the Kyrgyz Republic with high potential of further growth. Based on that, there were ominous recommendations for that: direct proximity and lower transportation cost in points of deliveries, among others. In 2019, the foreign trade turnover of the Kyrgyz Republic to Turkmenistan demonstrated positive dynamics and had increased by 66% compared to 2018. In that regard, the Kyrgyz Republic highly supported the positive initiatives of the Republic of Turkmenistan towards approaching the multilateral trading system and welcomed the Republic of Turkmenistan as an Observer of the World Trade Organization and wished every success in further stages of familiarising itself with the WTO Rules and Procedures in preparation for the initiation of the accession negotiations.

7.24. The representative of Kazakhstan supported the application of Turkmenistan for Observer Status at the General Council of the WTO and its subsidiary bodies and also welcomed Turkmenistan becoming a part of the WTO Acceding Governments as that process would contribute to Turkmenistan's economic development agenda to create an environment conducive to trade and investment and to integrate into the rules-based multilateral trading system. Turkmenistan was an important partner of Kazakhstan and both countries enjoyed free trade since the early 90s and strong cooperation in the energy sector and in the area of development of transport and transit corridors. Kazakhstan was looking forward to welcoming in the nearest future the launch of the accession process of Turkmenistan to the WTO and stood ready to share its expertise based on its own experience of accession to the WTO.

7.25. The representative of the Russian Federation strongly supported the granting of Observer Status to Turkmenistan in the General Council of the WTO and its subsidiary bodies. In fact, until that day, Turkmenistan had been the only Republic of the Former Soviet Union that had neither been a Member of the organization nor an Observer in it. Turkmenistan's decision to become an Observer to the WTO demonstrated the country's objective to adhere to the rules of the multilateral trading system. Their observer status would assist Ashgabat to get familiar with the WTO rules and procedures and prepare for the launch of their accession negotiations. In that regard, observer status provided for initiating negotiations for accessions to the WTO Agreement within a period of five years. The Russian Federation wished Turkmenistan success in that endeavour and pledged to provide all necessary support.

7.26. The representative of Paraguay associated with the statement made by the LLDCs and wished Turkmenistan every success in its work with the organization.

7.27. The representative of Pakistan congratulated and welcomed Turkmenistan on having been granted Observer Status in the General Council of the WTO and its subsidiary bodies. Turkmenistan was an important country in Central Asia for Pakistan to which it enjoyed excellent bilateral economic relations as well as regional cooperation through the ECO Framework. Pakistan wished Turkmenistan all the best in its next steps for accession and looked forward to working with its delegation.

7.28. The representative of Turkmenistan, speaking as an Observer, expressed its sincere appreciation to all of Members for their words of support. Turkmenistan assured the Membership that the development of the trade policy of Turkmenistan and its WTO negotiations would be guided

by the principles of openness and non-discrimination to all WTO Members for trade and investment partnerships so as to grow the economy and transform Turkmenistan into the country with a competitive economy that was fully integrated into the rules-based multilateral trading system.

7.29. The General Council took note of the statements.

8 COVID-19 INITIATIVE: PROTECTING GLOBAL FOOD SECURITY THROUGH OPEN TRADE - STATEMENT BY CO-SPONSORS OF WT/GC/218/REV.1

8.1. The Chairman said that Item 8 had been requested by Australia and concerned the COVID-19 Initiative: Protecting Global Food Security through Open Trade including the relevant communication circulated in document WT/GC/W/218/Rev.1.

8.2. The representative of Australia said that, on a personal note, it had been a privilege representing her country at the WTO. It had been a pleasure working with all of her colleagues to strengthen the multilateral trading system. She wished everyone the best in that endeavour and hoped that their paths would cross again soon.

8.3. As the Chairman had noted, Australia was making the statement on behalf of the Cairns Group co-sponsors of the COVID-19 Initiative: Protecting Global Food Security through Open Trade. The COVID-19 pandemic was a tragedy that continued to unfold posing unprecedented challenges to governments and communities. Australia's hearts and minds were with those most impacted by the pandemic. It was still uncertain how COVID-19 would change global agriculture and trade. All Members wanted and needed to support their agricultural sectors through the crisis. But at that critical time, it was vital that the agricultural support measures they put in place in response to COVID-19 did not undermine global food security.

8.4. In June, the Cairns Group members had launched the COVID-19 Initiative: Protecting Global Food Security through Open Trade. It was a modest but important initiative. It sought to limit the impacts of COVID-19 by reinforcing the importance of open markets, maintaining global supply chains and transparency. It was about preserving the existing global trading environment for agriculture and avoiding a slide into protectionism.

8.5. The initiative had grown out of the need to act on the growing number of agricultural support measures being introduced in response to COVID-19 around the world including export restrictions and agricultural subsidies. It reiterated calls for such measures to be targeted, proportionate, transparent, temporary and consistent with WTO rules and made further restraint, timely rollback and the avoidance of market distortions. It called for an agreement for WTO Members to not impose export restrictions on food purchased for humanitarian purposes. And it proposed greater scrutiny of COVID-19 agricultural support measures by the WTO Membership and tracking by the WTO Secretariat.

8.6. The initiative was squarely addressing the current challenges resulting from the pandemic. It was about ensuring Members' agricultural markets were able to continue to function – setting them to build back better once they entered the recovery phase. Improving the transparency of measures Members were all taking in response to the pandemic meant they were improving accountability. Improving accountability meant improving the strength and efficacy of the multilateral trading system on which all Members so heavily depended.

8.7. If Members relied on existing WTO notification procedures, it would be years, if ever, before they would be able to paint an accurate picture of how COVID-19 and Members' responses to the crisis were impacting trade and agriculture. Australia planned to submit soon a list of agricultural support measures it had introduced in response to COVID-19 and encouraged others to do the same. The European Union was the first to take that step followed by Israel – and Australia thanked them.

8.8. The initiative noted the importance of the continued agricultural reform process at the WTO. The WTO rules needed updating to provide a more stable trading environment with fewer distortions so that it would be able to respond more effectively to temporary shocks. Australia and the Cairns Group co-sponsors would welcome the support of Members and would also welcome their views and opinions on the matter.

8.9. The representative of Costa Rica noted that Costa Rica was a net exporter of agricultural products and a basic net importer of grains, so its markets depended upon predictability and transparency. It was extremely important to ensure that the agricultural value chains were not disrupted because of the pandemic all the more so at a time of extreme fragility in which its society was currently faced with as it dealt with the terrible loss of human lives and the abysmal economic and social costs and impacts of the pandemic.

8.10. In the WTO, there was a broad scope for action. All Members were in favour of transparency and predictability of global agricultural markets. Along those lines, the initiative that Costa Rica was co-sponsoring that day contained specific elements on which the WTO could act and could provide immediate solutions. Costa Rica hoped that Members would positively view the steps that the co-sponsors were taking and urged them to support the initiative.

8.11. The representative of Canada said that the COVID-19 pandemic was a global health issue that required all Members to focus on health and safety of their citizens. Members should take action to ensure agriculture trade remained open and predictable as they responded to the crisis. Measures such as export restrictions and other unjustified trade measures on agriculture and agri-food products resulted in an unpredictable trading environment that could adversely affect food security.

8.12. On 17 June, members of the Cairns Group had launched the COVID-19 Initiative: Protecting Global Food Security through Open Trade to support the global agriculture and food system during the COVID-19 pandemic and limit the impact of emergency measures on global food security. The initiative identified specific actions to undertake in support of continuing an open trade in agriculture products. Through the initiative, the co-sponsors committed themselves and called on Members to ensure that any emergency measure in agriculture in response to COVID-19 and its effects were targeted, proportionate, transparent, temporary and consistent with WTO rules and that they negotiated an agreement for WTO Members to not impose export restrictions on food aid purchased for humanitarian purposes and engaged in greater transparency about agricultural COVID-19 trade related measures.

8.13. Canada fully supported the Cairns Group statement and was actively working to inform the WTO of its agricultural COVID-19 trade-related measures as soon as practicable. Canada invited other Members to join the co-sponsors in that transparency effort.

8.14. The representative of Argentina associated with the statement made by Australia in connection with document WT/GC/218/Rev.1. In that document, twelve Members had entered into specific commitments within the framework of the COVID-19 pandemic with a goal of protecting global food security through open trade. Argentina appealed to the entire Membership to support the initiative which covered reductions and the dismantling of all measures causing trade disruptions or distortions to production. At the same time, in line with the G20 Agreement, Argentina had made a commitment and appealed to other Members not to impose restrictions on agricultural product exports and foodstuffs acquired by LDCs or humanitarian agencies with a non-commercial goal of humanitarian food assistance.

8.15. Moreover, the document WT/GC/218/Rev.1 likewise contained commitments concerning transparency. It also appealed to the Secretariat to continue to carry out its monitoring activities concerning trade measures applied in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Argentina, together with the co-sponsors, had reaffirmed their commitment to continue to note progress in the reform of the WTO with the objective of a fair, market-oriented agricultural trading system. Argentina therefore called on all Members to endorse the commitments reflected in that document.

8.16. The representative of Uruguay said that his country co-sponsored the initiative submitted that day by the delegation of Australia. Uruguay was firmly convinced that the response to the global crisis of COVID-19 should be coordinated and unequivocal. It should be based upon cooperation and international trade with agricultural markets that were open and predictable and supply chains which were connected and functioning. International trade which was open and predictable played a fundamental role in ensuring and strengthening food security at the global level. In the current situation, such trade should be facilitated and not distorted nor hindered in an unjustified way.

8.17. Members should not change their positions based on restrictive narratives of food sovereignty and self-sufficiency. To ensure that food could go from the production to the consumption side

without a problem, importers and exporters should take measures to contribute to the smooth operation of supply chains. Whereas the former should commit themselves to avoiding the imposition of restrictions on exports of agricultural products, the latter should avoid the imposition of unjustified obstacles to imports – and to consider the implementation of trade facilitating measures whenever possible.

8.18. Uruguay had followed with concern the announcements and implementation by some Members of millions of programmes and subsidies to production and stockholding of agricultural foodstuff amongst other measures in response to COVID-19. In that sense, Uruguay urged Members to be as moderate as possible in introducing measures which could have distorting effects on international markets changing the trade opportunities of third parties or principally their food security base. Those measures should be targeted, proportionate, transparent, and temporary. They should not create unnecessary obstacles to trade or disturb the supply chains. They should also be fully in line with the obligations entered into in the World Trade Organization. Withdrawing them should be in as timely and effective a manner as possible. Those should not be maintained beyond the short period for which such measures were strictly necessary.

8.19. For the purposes of ensuring appropriate transparency and follow up of measures implemented in response to COVID-19 in agriculture, Uruguay urged all Members to provide detailed information in a timely manner on such measures to the WTO and thanked those Members which had already done so. At the same time, Uruguay encouraged the Secretariat to continue with its good work on the subject including in its analysis of border measures and also of competition policy in connection with exports as well as domestic support.

8.20. Although Uruguay recognised existing problems, Members should continue with their work under the three negotiating pillars on agriculture in order to make progress with the objective of carrying out a reform in agriculture that should be fair and market-oriented including through having positive, significant results at the next Ministerial Conference. That objective had become even more essential and urgent than it had been a few months ago.

8.21. The representative of Brazil noted that, during the previous week, the FAO Report on the State of the Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2020 had shown that prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, hunger had affected 690 million people worldwide in 2019. That represented 9% of the global population – which had increased by nearly 60 million people from 2014. The COVID-19 pandemic would likely make things worse in 2020. Their joint statement was underscored by the fact that open trade of food and agriculture products had an important role not only in ensuring but also in supporting global food security.

8.22. Through the initiative, the co-sponsors had made sixteen commitments in different areas from food aid to agriculture reform. They called on all Members to join their efforts to ensure that emergency measures in agriculture adopted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic were targeted, proportionate, transparent, temporary and consistent with the WTO rules. They urged also for those measures to be rolled back in a timely and effective manner.

8.23. The representative of Peru commended Australia for its leadership in the Cairns Group and for presenting the important initiative with the objective of protecting global food security through open agricultural trade. Peru noted that it was a co-sponsor of that initiative. The health crisis triggered by COVID-19 had presented an unprecedented challenge to the international community with its actual impact on various areas yet to be known. With the initiative, the co-sponsors were reiterating the importance of openness and predictability in agricultural markets, the preservation of agricultural supply chains and transparency in emergency measures adopted.

8.24. For those reasons, the co-sponsors called on Members that had adopted or were adopting emergency measures in response to the pandemic which could have distorting effects on agriculture trade to ensure that they were specific, proportionate, transparent, and temporary; that they were notified in a timely manner to the Secretariat and that they were withdrawn in a timely fashion in order to minimise the negative impact that those could have on international trade.

8.25. Those actions were crucial not only to confront the pandemic but also to support the recovery of their economies and for the joint efforts of all to build back better following the pandemic. Peru

reiterated its commitment to continue pursuing the process of agricultural reform within the WTO – one of the significant pending issues on the negotiating agenda of the organization.

8.26. The representative of Paraguay said that the economic and social crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic had placed great pressure on international trade in order to ensure the supply of essential goods during the crisis which included food. Various Members had implemented trade facilitation measures and even temporary reduction of barriers in order to respond to the demand of food among their population. However, and despite the fact that the global system for food production had been able to respond to the crisis and rapid changes in demand, it was necessary that Members preserved an open and predictable trading system to ensure the flow of food and to guarantee food security.

8.27. The measures adopted in order to guarantee the safety of food should be based on international standards and scientific evidence. In order to avoid any unnecessary barriers to trade, vulnerable sectors should receive the necessary assistance to guarantee continuity in production and in trade in that difficult time. At that extraordinary time, extraordinary measures were required but that should not become the new normal. It was for that reason that Members should ensure that extraordinary measures to respond to the crisis generated by COVID-19 were lifted as the crisis and its effect was overcome.

8.28. Those measures while in place should be targeted, specific, transparent and based on scientific evidence proportional to the problems that they sought to respond to and most importantly to not affect the agriculture and the agricultural opportunities of third parties and their commitments undertaken within the organization. The co-sponsors of the initiative in terms of transparency, reform and domestic support in other areas were seeking to alleviate the impact of the pandemic and to promote economic recovery which enjoyed the benefits of fair and open agricultural trade.

8.29. Paraguay highlighted a fundamental element of that initiative with regard to transparency which sought to cover the different kinds of measures adopted by Members including those of domestic support. Although Paraguay congratulated the Secretariat for the monitoring work that they had carried in terms of the review mechanisms of trade policies, Paraguay noted that some subsidies were not covered in that work. Agriculture subsidies should be monitored in order to prevent any abuses.

8.30. Paraguay had listed all measures adopted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and those would be examined in the next meeting of the Committee on Agriculture. Paraguay encouraged all Members to share similar documents listing those measures without prejudice to the notification obligations under the Agreement on Agriculture. Paraguay thanked the European Union and Israel for the presentation of their measures which had already been circulated among Members in favour of transparency.

8.31. The crisis had shown Members the importance of having a predictable and open agricultural trade system having fluid trade in order to confront the extraordinary situation. Paraguay underscored the importance of developing disciplines which would allow Members to ensure that future crisis would not impact food security and stability in agricultural markets. Paraguay called on the re-initiation of negotiations in that area as soon as possible within the reform process to pursue what had been stipulated in Article 20 of the Agreement on Agriculture. Paraguay assured Members that with the new CoA SS Chair – Ambassador Gloria Abraham Peralta (Costa Rica) – Members would be able to achieve significant and positive results in all pillars of reform for the next Ministerial Conference. The CoA SS Chair had Paraguay's full support in pursuing that goal.

8.32. The representative of New Zealand had joined in a number of initiatives that had sought to facilitate trade and provide stability and access to essential products in the face of the devastating pandemic. New Zealand was pleased to support the Cairns Group COVID-19 Initiative: Protecting Global Food Security through Open Trade. COVID-19 had highlighted the important role that agricultural trade played in ensuring the food security and supporting the economic well-being of billions of people around the world.

8.33. New Zealand saw the initiative as fundamentally important to both addressing Members' shared and heightened global food security challenge and enabling the agriculture sector – so important to a wide range of Members to help contribute to their collective economic recovery. The

statement was open to all Members and New Zealand strongly encouraged all of them to consider joining in that important initiative.

8.34. The representative of Japan considered that it was a vital theme to protect global food security under the current circumstances. Japan joined other delegations in stressing the importance of the monitoring process to promote transparency on COVID-19 related agricultural trade measures. Japan recognised that the process in the WTO had been functioning well as had been seen for example during the special meeting of the Committee on Agriculture held in June. From that perspective, the proposed establishment of a new Working Group could cause some duplication of Members' work.

8.35. On agriculture negotiations, Japan would contribute to the discussions in the CoA SS from its perspective as a food importing Member. In particular, Japan wished to stress the importance of disciplines on export restrictions with significant importance to world trade and global food security which had been underlined by the COVID-19 crisis.

8.36. The representative of Chile extended its gratitude to Australia for its efforts and for presenting the statement of the Cairns Group on the COVID-19 Initiative: Protecting Global Food Security through Open Trade. The title of the initiative was very simple. It not only posed a challenge but also a solution. Chile believed in open trade and that it provided a solution to the current challenges Members were faced with including in relation to food security – a principle that should always be upheld. As Members faced much uncertainty, they should not forget to likewise recognise the commitments that they had undertaken. Rather than looking at their own interests, Members should think of the collective good that open markets and global food chains could provide.

8.37. Undoubtedly, protectionism, trade barriers, closing borders and interrupting markets and supply chains were illnesses which undermined the very basis and principles that Members believed in. Those had the potential to bring about highly negative damage and consequences in international markets particularly in agriculture markets. In that regard and as had been mentioned in various fora, Chile expressed its concern over the rising number of protectionist measures implemented by Members. Negative impacts could also be derived from measures enacted by certain Members with regard to food security which could cause damage to trade flows. Such impacts could also be in the form of market volatility and the growing existence of logistical issues especially during the pandemic – which Chile had experienced first-hand.

8.38. Chile also called on Members to respect their transparency commitments. As Members all knew and as they had all repeatedly heard, transparency was the first step to greater trust between Members. For the same reason, it was important to highlight the commitments that they had undertaken during the COVID-19 period in order to reduce and minimise the economic impacts of the pandemic. In that regard, Chile reiterated its firm commitment to the WTO negotiation process.

8.39. The representative of the United States appreciated the contribution of the Cairns Group to the vital issue of protecting food security during the pandemic. The United States agreed that avoiding unjustified disruption to agricultural trade was essential to ensure that people all over the world had access to food, fibre and other products. Further, agriculture was a key sector of the global economy, employing over a quarter of the global workforce, including over fifty percent of people in low-income countries.

8.40. Trade was essential in ensuring the availability of diversified, safe and nutritious food for all. While the United States did not support all aspects of the proposal, it recognised a number of areas of agreement and looked forward to continuing that discussion. The United States maintained that all emergency measures in response to COVID-19 should be targeted, temporary, proportionate, science-based, and transparent.

8.41. The United States reiterated its commitment to protecting public health and to complying with its WTO obligations. The global nature of that public health crisis shone a spotlight on the critical importance of compliance with WTO obligations to ensure that workers and consumers had the goods they needed in those difficult times.

8.42. As countries worldwide turned their collective attention toward addressing the epic public health and economic crises created by COVID-19, the United States highlighted its deep concern

about China's recent actions that were disrupting agricultural trade. The details of China's actions were contained in the US submission to the SPS Committee in document G/SPS/GEN/1798 concerning COVID-19 testing on imported food and agricultural products and "letter of commitment" attestations.

8.43. Through its notification in document G/SPS/GEN/1812, China asserted that its actions were to protect consumer health from transmission of COVID-19. However, the FAO/WHO Guidance cited by China in its notification stated clearly that there "is no evidence to date of viruses that cause respiratory illnesses being transmitted via food or food packaging". Rather than protecting consumers, China's actions unnecessarily disrupted food supply chains at a time of extreme fragility.

8.44. Consistent with the Cairns Group proposal, the United States asked that all Members based their actions to protect public health and safety amid the COVID-19 pandemic on scientific principles and evidence of risk, and to avoid unnecessary barriers to food trade that was vital to global food security in the current crisis.

8.45. The representative of Singapore appreciated the Cairns Group members for the timely, proactive and concrete initiative on protecting global food security to open trade. In particular, Singapore commended their commitment not to impose export restrictions or extraordinary taxes on food and agricultural products purchased for non-commercial, humanitarian purposes by the World Food Programme and other humanitarian agencies as well as the call for Members to reach a permanent multilateral agreement on the issue.

8.46. On 17 July, the World Food Programme and the FAO identified almost thirty countries that were on the verge of impending COVID-19 driven food crisis. Those countries which were mainly LDCs in Africa were close to the cliff's edge as the pandemic's knock on effects had aggravated pre-existing drivers of hunger. They had highlighted that no region in the world was immune and there were rising numbers of people being pushed over the edge into acute hunger.

8.47. The Report on the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2020 issued by various UN Agencies in July had also indicated that between 83 and 132 million people could be added to the total number of undernourished in the world in 2020. That was in addition to the nearly 690 million who were already facing hunger.

8.48. Hence, Singapore had consistently highlighted that Members should not impose export restrictions on foodstuffs purchased for non-commercial, humanitarian purposes by the World Food Programme. Singapore welcomed the G20's reaffirmation of the same commitment in 2020. Singapore looked forward to making that a reality in the WTO as soon as possible because that was something Members could and should do.

8.49. The representative of Ukraine commended Australia for its insightful presentation and other co-sponsors for their valuable contribution to the preparation of the initiative which provided for a response to challenges brought about by the spread of COVID-19. The COVID-19 pandemic had placed unprecedented pressure on global health and food security adversely affecting agriculture and food supply chains and forcing Members to take additional measures to reduce the negative impact of the pandemic on their economic and social life. At the same time, the crisis caused by COVID-19 had underlined the importance of the WTO's role in helping ensure coordination and coherence between actions taken by Members as well as advancing the agricultural reform process.

8.50. Ukraine was convinced that the current crisis should not jeopardise Members' work on the ongoing agricultural negotiations results of which could help them build resilience and find solution for those challenges. That would require initiative and engagement from all Members in order to be successful. Ukraine would like to reconfirm its interest in looking for ways to minimise and overcome the negative effect of the COVID-19 pandemic including its possible second wave on agricultural trade and food security.

8.51. The representative of China appreciated the efforts made by the Cairns Group on the COVID-19 initiative. As it was still conducting detailed analysis, China would provide its preliminary reactions. China did not prefer to set up a Working Group on the impact of the pandemic on agriculture. China instead supported the enhancement of the functions and the responsibilities of the Committee on Agriculture in reviewing the policy matters adopted by Members in combatting

the pandemic to ensure they remained open, transparent and WTO rules-consistent. Before and after the pandemic, all the SPS measures adopted by China were based on science and prudence.

8.52. China strongly believed that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic had clearly further indicated the importance of food security issues in the WTO negotiations. China hoped Members would make a joint effort in public stockholding negotiations for a permanent solution that benefited all developing Members for food security.

8.53. Regarding the approach to reduce the trade distorting support in agriculture, China always stressed the rule deficit and imbalance. Such elimination of the most trade distorting Aggregate Measurement of Support should be the top priority in reforming relevant support policy for the agriculture sector.

8.54. The representative of the United Kingdom welcomed the fact that Members were coordinating their collective responses to COVID-19 at the WTO as well as through other groups like the G20. Recognising that that challenge should be faced together, the United Kingdom along with numerous other Members had co-sponsored the Canada-led statement that highlighted the importance of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic with open and predictable trade in agriculture and food products.

8.55. In line with the statement made by G20 Agriculture Ministers, the United Kingdom would continue to work to ensure that any emergency trade measures deemed necessary that Members took were targeted, proportionate, transparent and temporary; that they reflected their interests in protecting the most vulnerable; that they did not create unnecessary barriers to trade or disruption to global supply chains including on food and that they were consistent with WTO rules.

8.56. The United Kingdom was pivoting its Aid for Trade Programmes to help its developing country partners mitigate the effects of COVID-19. Through its support to the World Bank Trade Facilitation Support Programme, the United Kingdom had been able to build capacity by delivering training and guidance on managing risks and facilitating trade during the crisis to its developing country partners. Through that immediate support, the United Kingdom had been able to help its partners in managing their borders and prioritising critical shipments to most effectively respond to the pandemic. The United Kingdom looked forward to continuing to work together with Members to deliver a coordinated response to COVID-19.

8.57. The representative of Nigeria said that the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on most African States had further shed light on food security difficulties as well as the related livelihood and extreme poverty issues experienced in the region. There was therefore need for a holistic and sustainable approach to address food and livelihood security difficulties. Such approach should include initiatives to address the structural and systemic issues undermining the competitiveness of local producers even in their domestic market and stifling the livelihoods of resource-poor farmers thereby triggering massive unemployment and avoidable migration.

8.58. An open and effectively connected global agriculture supply chain had some beneficial effects on food availability. However, food availability did not mean food accessibility. For food to be accessible, the need to tackle the broader issues of livelihood security and poverty could not be overemphasised. That would require the WTO to address the imbalance in the current WTO agriculture discipline that underpinned the lopsided and disproportionate sharing of the benefits of global agriculture trade. At present, Nigeria's local producers and resource poor farmers were struggling to cope with the economic losses and social dislocations occasioned by abysmally low world market price due to massive subsidy schemes of some Members. The proposal which effectively required Members to dismantle tariff on agricultural products would not address Nigeria's food and livelihood security difficulties. It would only decimate its agriculture sector and would further worsen its food and livelihood security problems.

8.59. In the words of the most respected UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Professor Olivier De Schutter of Belgium, "In the long term, poor net-food-importing countries will not be helped by being fed. They will be helped by being able to feed themselves." Rather than calling on developing countries to dismantle agriculture tariff and allow the influx of heavily subsidized products, the WTO could actually address the issue of food and livelihood security difficulties of developing countries by addressing the inequities and imbalances of the current rule

where some Members had AMS entitlement as well as recourse to Special Safeguards and others did not. The WTO could also address food and livelihood security difficulties by advancing the discussions on PSH beyond the Bali 'Peace Clause' and agreeing on a decision to create a separate Annex for PSH programmes related subsidies. It was also pertinent that the WTO refrained from calling for the suspension of legal policy tools under Article 12 of the Agreement on Agriculture that were of critical importance in addressing food security issues in times of price volatility.

8.60. The representative of the European Union noted that the submission presented that day had been discussed in the June meeting of the Committee on Agriculture. The paper contained many elements from the statement on open and predictable trade in document WT/GC/208 – G/AG/30 from May which the European Union had joined as co-sponsor.

8.61. Looking at the proposed commitments in the paper, those under the heading of "restraint" did not seem to capture accurately the balance of the measures introduced so far in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic notably considering the multibillion dollar agricultural packages which had been adopted by some major Members. Those would require a more detailed scrutiny by all Members including by the Cairns Group. The list of proposed rollback commitments also seemed to be missing any reference to the illegal export subsidies which had been introduced during the COVID-19 crisis by at least one of the co-sponsors of the paper. They should be reflected alongside other types of measures.

8.62. As to the commitments on food aid, the European Union agreed that that was indeed an important element. International food aid should not be a way to circumvent commitments in export competition. To the list under point 10, the European Union would add that monetisation of food aid should be avoided. The European Union had long supported exempting WFP purchases from export restrictions. That was a well overdue issue which should have been a development friendly outcome of MC11 in Buenos Aires.

8.63. The commitments on transparency were equally very important and the European Union had been an advocate of transparency on COVID-19 measures in agriculture but also more widely. It was a pity therefore that none of the co-sponsors of the paper had submitted any report on their own agricultural COVID-19 measures. The European Union had walked the walk by submitting its own ad hoc report on the agricultural COVID-19 measures in June and intended to update it before the next Committee on Agriculture meeting at the end of the month. The European Union encouraged other Members, notably the co-sponsors of the paper, to step up efforts and provide the necessary transparency.

8.64. The European Union could support the request for an agenda item focused on COVID-19 as part of future Committee on Agriculture meetings. Indeed, that was likely to be an issue of interest for some months or even years to come. However, the European Union did not see any need to create a new structure such as a COVID-19 Agricultural Working Group. With the regular agenda point in the Committee on Agriculture, Members already had a forum to discuss such matters.

8.65. The representative of the Russian Federation appreciated Members' attention to the issue of global food security and generally shared their concerns expressed in that regard. All of the elements mentioned in the initiative including transparency and restraint on trade restrictive measures and reforming the rules were important for mitigating the impact of COVID-19. Russia would support the reaffirmation of the commitments concerning food aid that was to be provided in fully grant form driven by needs, avoiding commercial displacement and adverse impacts on local and regional production of markets. The Russian Federation also supported the appeal of the co-sponsors of the initiative held to the development of WTO rules aimed at establishment of fair and market-oriented agricultural trading system. At the same time, the first step should be to endeavour the level playing field for Members as had been mentioned by several previous speakers on the item.

8.66. The representative of Pakistan said that the COVID-19 situation continued to evolve with considerable uncertainty across the globe. That was true particularly in the case of Pakistan where it reportedly had yet to see the peak of the pandemic in terms of infections. While Pakistan continued to emphasise the importance of continuing open trade in agriculture products, it was important to understand that for many countries, domestic food production and security figured as one of the most important challenges. The same was true for Pakistan. Pakistan acknowledged the importance

of international trade in maintaining global supply chains and at the same time emphasised that the delicate balance between maintaining open trade and domestic considerations should be maintained.

8.67. History stood witness that imprudent policies could expose poor populations of food surplus and food producing countries to famine. Amartya Sen, a Nobel Laureate, had demonstrated in his seminal work on famines that even when exports were allowed unrestricted aid to the domestic situation, food was procured by those with higher purchasing power leaving the poor to suffer the consequences of famine and starvation. That was a perfect instance of market failure for which Members should pay attention to the correction mechanisms already provided for in the covered agreements. Without those corrective measures such as transparently used export restrictions, domestic markets of poor countries would remain vulnerable to food shortages in times of global crisis where higher purchasing power remained the sole determinant on who got to buy food in an open market.

8.68. The Government of Pakistan was facing multiple challenges on several fronts alongside COVID-19 including a severe locust attack on food crops. The FAO had warned of a serious infestation in Pakistan that could lead to a major threat to food security. According to FAO estimates, 37% of Pakistan's cultivable area was in immediate danger of serious invasion. A loss of around USD 3 billion at 25% damage level was projected to major crops such as wheat, grains and potato alone. Some experts believed that locusts posed a greater threat to Pakistan's economy than the COVID-19 pandemic and would further exacerbate its already precarious food security situation. It was also predicted that several countries in the region could be affected by those attacks. Therefore, while Pakistan maintained and recognised that any measures taken should be temporary and transparent, it also believed in the right of each Member to use options that were consistent with WTO rules to ensure food security and livelihood of their populations.

8.69. The representative of Qatar welcomed the communication of the Cairns Group. For many years, a balanced agreement on food security had been a priority for the State of Qatar as it was located in an arid area and was a net food importer. The COVID-19 crisis had confirmed the importance and urgency of reaching an understanding on food security to ensure that all had access to sufficient food supplies whenever a crisis occurred.

8.70. In recent months, a number of Members including Qatar had called for trade of agricultural goods to remain open and invited Members to refrain from adopting trade distortive measures. While some Members had adopted trade liberalising measures to facilitate exports and/or imports of basic agricultural commodities, others had had to impose emergency measures to guarantee access to food at times when the lives of citizens and the economy had been severely disrupted.

8.71. As the COVID-19 crisis was still ongoing despite the overall resilience of agricultural markets, Qatar stood by the basic principles and commitments set forth in the joint statement to the General Council and to the Committee on Agriculture entitled "A Call to Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic with Open and Predictable Trade in Agricultural and Food Products". While Members should continue to ensure that restrictions on trade of agricultural products where warranted were temporary, proportionate and transparent, Qatar considered that the Membership should also seek to capitalise on that recent experience and build on the discussions on food security that had taken place over the last decade to actively reengage on the issue with a view to reaching an agreement on trade and food security.

8.72. Qatar supported negotiations to try to reach a balanced agreement by MC12. Such an agreement would allow Members to be better prepared for the crisis and would enhance predictability. Members should start by considering rules to increase transparency yet more transparency alone would not be sufficient to ensure that open trade and food security objectives could be attained. Members should build on past negotiations to ensure that food security related to agricultural and agri-food products were temporary, targeted and proportionate. For that purpose, Members should consider a broad review on WTO rules on Public Stockholding for Food Security Purposes and export prohibitions and restrictions including a re-assessment of the conditions set forth in Article VI.a.2 of the GATT 1994.

8.73. Balance should be found between the ability for developing countries to have food security policies that effectively allowed them to ensure access of their populations to sufficient food supplies while limiting their restrictive and distortive effects that such policies could have on trade of

agricultural products. Qatar was looking forward to further discussions among Members on that important issue with a view to rapidly advancing towards a long-term solution by MC12.

8.74. The representative of Botswana, on behalf of the African Group, noted that, as had been underscored in the submission presented that day, the essentiality of agriculture to the global economy and particularly the economies of developing and LDC Members could not be overemphasised. In that context, the African Group stressed that while the current crisis had highlighted the importance of keeping supply chains open, it had demonstrated even more the need for policies and measures to improve access to food for the poor and vulnerable.

8.75. The African Group acknowledged the long-term objective of the Agreement on Agriculture to establish a fair and market-oriented agricultural trading system. A fair system implied one that took into account non-trade concerns of the more vulnerable Members and that supported a Member to build more resilient agricultural sectors to be prepared for crisis and shocks. In that context, the African Group reiterated the priorities it had outlined in its submission on the implications of COVID-19 in document WT/GC/219.

8.76. With regard to the document at hand, the African Group sought clarification from the co-sponsors regarding the sources of information to be used particularly noting that they proposed that the Secretariat be requested to identify, register and publish them. That was in view of the fact that the document did not state that the source of such information should be exclusive to Members' notifications as per the relevant provision of Article 18 of the Agreement on Agriculture. In addition, the African Group would appreciate the proponents' elaboration on the need to specialise COVID-19 Agricultural Working Group and the suggestion to have a new agenda item at the upcoming Committee on Agriculture meeting on COVID-19.

8.77. The African Group fully subscribed to the importance of transparency at the cornerstone of Members' work. The African Group echoed the call by the proponents on the need for further transparency on agricultural COVID-19 related measures and in that vein, the African Group commended the exchange Members had on the issue in the framework of the CoA SS meeting on 18 June. The African Group applauded the Secretariat for its efforts in facilitating access to information on such measures which were of particular benefit for MSMEs.

8.78. Nonetheless, it was important to take into consideration the capacity constraints facing developing and LDC Members in meeting their existing transparency obligation. In that context, the African Group did not share the co-sponsors' view that additional notification requirements to more than one WTO Body would be feasible for all Members. On the issues currently being discussed in the CoA SS framework, the African Group would come back with its comments on those issues at the negotiating group's special meeting.

8.79. The representative of Jamaica, on behalf of the ACP Group, acknowledged the unprecedented challenges posed by COVID-19 including on the agriculture sector of the ACP economies. The ACP Group also continued to highlight the importance of the WTO in global efforts to manage the impact of the pandemic especially as it related to minimising trade imbalance and enhancing food security. The effectiveness of the WTO's role would be enhanced if national measures deemed appropriate to address the impact of the pandemic was targeted, temporary, proportionate and in line with Members' commitments in WTO rules.

8.80. Importantly, the ACP Group saw an outcome on PSH as a crucial element of the WTO's efforts to address the food security risks posed by COVID-19 and any similar future shock to global agriculture production and trade. PSH disciplines should also allow for both existing and new programmes that could become necessary that day but had not been foreseen in 2013. Transparency measures should be in line with the capacity of developing and LDC Members so that they would be able to use the disciplines when it was necessary to do so.

8.81. The ACP Group agreed that an outcome on domestic support would be effective in the WTO's work to manage market imbalance occasioned by crisis such as COVID-19. Imbalance in the Agreement on Agriculture should be addressed, and any outcome should be embedded with appropriate S&DT for developing and LDC Members.

8.82. The representative of Chad, on behalf of the LDCs, said that it was true that the COVID-19 crisis seriously affected the LDC economies and their exports as well as their imports by paralysing the very functioning of their domestic enterprises because of restrictions on the movements of populations and the closing of borders. The LDC Group had submitted a communication in May tackling the same global subject and the importance of taking measures to enable a smooth flow of trade in agricultural products in particular during the COVID-19 crisis which was destabilising the operations both of Members' economies and of world trade.

8.83. As far as the LDCs were concerned, it was essential to avoid food shortage which would worsen the already extremely difficult conditions in which they were combatting the pandemic. That was why the LDC Group had explicitly requested in its communication for Members to refrain from imposing restrictions on the exports of agricultural products that their populations so much needed. There were regulatory provisions which made it possible for Members to temporarily set up restrictions. With the current situation on domestic stocks and production capacity, the LDC Group made an appeal to the solidarity and maintenance of open trade in agricultural products.

8.84. It was important to closely follow the consequences of the health crisis so that Members could minimise its impact on their trade a fortiori when they were talking about medical or pharmaceutical products which were useful for combatting the pandemic and trade in basic agricultural products that were necessary to feed their populations. The LDC Group called on Members to remain flexible and to take account of that unusual situation resulting from exceptional circumstances linked to the pandemic which was affecting all Members so that the LDCs could continue to meet that difficult challenge.

8.85. The representative of South Africa associated with the statements made by the African Group and the ACP. The world was facing a pandemic of a significant scale. Agriculture was one of Africa's most important economic sectors making up 23% of the continent's GDP. In sub-Saharan Africa, it provided work for nearly 60% of the economically active population. Of concern was that Africa was a net food importer even though it had 60% of arable land globally.

8.86. In recognition of the importance of agriculture and as a response to the pandemic, South Africa had ensured that agriculture as a sector continued to operate during the lockdown. The government had also allowed the transit and export of food through their ports as they were interlinked with the region and continent. In that regard, special certification arrangements had been implemented at border posts to ease administrative procedures in the wake of the pandemic. Those measures had been notified to the SPS Committee.

8.87. The imbalances in the Agreement on agriculture affected national and global agriculture production and trade and displaced farmers both in the domestic and international markets. The more sustainable way of protecting global food security was to urgently address those imbalances. Key steps to respond to the crisis should include boosting domestic production to safeguard food security and the WTO rules should support that agenda.

8.88. That necessitated that the WTO prioritised: (i) a meaningful outcome on trade distorting domestic support. In that regard, South Africa was concerned about the impact of the disposal of subsidised stocks at a time when producers were under immense pressure as a result of COVID-19. South Africa was already experiencing the impact of that on some of the agriculture products such as frozen potato chips. South Africa called on all Members to ensure that agricultural support measures remained within the rules provided by the multilateral trading system; (ii) preserving the flexibility under Article 6.2 of the Agreement on Agriculture to support low-income or resource-poor producers remained relevant; (iii) delivering on PSH for food security purposes and to make provision for the inclusion of new programmes; (iv) an outcome on SSM to address the destabilising and crippling effects of import surges and downward price swings in the increasingly volatile global agricultural markets remained relevant; and, (v) dealing with trade restrictive SPS requirements as they added to the series of costs faced by exporters. While the South Africa recognised the right of Members to determine the appropriate level of SPS protection and to establish measures to that end, those should be scientifically based and not disguised restrictions.

8.89. South Africa saw trade as an important aspect of a future recovery and for trade to be part of a comprehensive solution that promoted production-led response to COVID-19 and food security. Trade facilitated access to food during local production shocks and across different production

seasons and acted to prevent domestic shortages. Open trade alone was not sufficient and Members needed a more balanced approach to food security.

8.90. Members needed tailored responses that responded to specific challenges of Members in accordance with WTO agreements. One size fits all approaches could not be sufficient in enhancing Members' preparedness for future crises and to pursue economic recovery. Transparency was one of the important pillars of the multilateral trading system and Members also needed to recognise the challenges that developing countries faced in meeting their transparency obligations due to limited capacities and resources, especially in the context of a crisis.

8.91. The representative of India acknowledged the importance of coordinating the global response in a way that avoided unnecessary disruption in the flow of critical medical and agricultural supplies. India had been playing a proactive role in ensuring the availability of vital drugs such as hydroxychloroquine and paracetamol across the globe. India had donated and exported critical medical supplies to more than 150 countries following the outbreak of the pandemic. India had also put in place trade facilitation measures such as electronic filing of several trade-related documents to facilitate the uninterrupted movement of goods during the pandemic.

8.92. India agreed that emergency measures taken in the wake of the pandemic should be "targeted, proportionate, transparent, and temporary". In India's understanding, doing away with the useful and limited policy instrument of export restrictions was not a silver bullet that would guarantee the access of food for all. In fact, from what India had seen, that was likely to lead to a flight of those critical products to the highest bidder, making them inaccessible to the resource-poor population.

8.93. Export restriction was a WTO-consistent policy tool that was important to prevent critical domestic shortages of essential supplies. Undoubtedly, it was important that those export restrictions were imposed with restraint and were temporary. In that context, India informed the Membership that it had not imposed export restrictions on any agricultural products during the COVID-19 pandemic.

8.94. A more effective and lasting way to ensure the food security of the most vulnerable would be by agreeing to eliminate the historic asymmetries in the Agreement on Agriculture, and delivering on the long-standing Ministerial mandate to establish permanent, adequate and accessible disciplines on Public Stockholding for food security purposes by MC12.

8.95. On the proposal of a separate Working Group, Members were aware that the Committee on Agriculture had agreed to include a dedicated and recurring agenda item on Covid-19 in its meetings until such time as measures taken in the wake of COVID-19 continued to remain in force. India agreed that that was a useful initiative to exchange information, learn from experiences of the Membership in tackling the pandemic and review the agricultural measures put in place by Members in the wake of COVID-19. With a recurring agenda item on COVID-19 and agricultural trade added to the agenda of all forthcoming Committee on Agriculture meetings in the short term, India did not see the utility of having a separate working group on COVID-19 and agriculture trade.

8.96. As a responsible Member of the rules-based multilateral trading system, India stood ready to work constructively with other Members to formulate a balanced, inclusive and calibrated response to COVID-19 in order to protect human life, food security and restore global economic stability.

8.97. The representative of Indonesia supported the initiative which did not only emphasise the importance of open trade for global food security but was also fundamental in stressing the significance of trade in complementing domestic production and in sustaining the agricultural supply chain. While trade should remain open, it was also important to not only rely on trade for food security. Members should enhance local production and maximise the capacity to increase domestic production for global food security in general and for domestic needs in particular.

8.98. By encouraging domestic food production capacity, Members would also reduce the vulnerability of small-scale farmers, in particular given the current pandemic situation. In the context of food security, Indonesia emphasised the importance of maintaining efforts to achieve a permanent solution on public stockholding for food security and a balanced outcome in SSM. They had become even more relevant to help face both the challenges posed by the pandemic and the future.

8.99. The representative of Malaysia said that the COVID-19 pandemic posed huge challenges for the global community. While the focus at the beginning had been on health issues, it had become clear that the crisis would also have a big impact on many other areas including trade and economy. During the emergence of COVID-19, nearly 900 million people worldwide had lacked access to adequate and sufficient food necessitating Members to give more attention to the food security issue. As a co-sponsor of the initiative, Malaysia called on all Members to ensure that any emergency measures in agriculture in response to COVID-19 were targeted, proportionate, transparent, temporary and consistent with WTO rules and fully encouraged Members to support the initiative.

8.100. The representative of Australia thanked all those that had participated so actively in the debate on the initiative that day. Australia picked up on two points that had been made by a few Members. The first one was on the issue of transparency that had been raised by the European Union. Australia again commended the European Union and Israel for leading the charge in preparing ad hoc notifications of agricultural measures. Australia was preparing a list of its own COVID-19 agriculture support measures and would submit that shortly. Australia called on others to do likewise.

8.101. On the proposed Agricultural Working Group and its relationship with the Committee on Agriculture which had been raised by a number of delegations including India, Botswana, Japan, China and the European Union, Australia noted that the co-sponsors were committed to working within the Committee on Agriculture and with the Secretariat to assess the impacts of COVID-19. That was why their initiative proposed the regular COVID-19 agenda item for the meetings of the Committee on Agriculture which had been agreed by Members.

8.102. The co-sponsors would therefore be using that forum to further discuss transparency of COVID-19 related measures. The co-sponsors believed however that Members should not dismiss other efforts including Informal Working Groups which could also help them consider how best to track agriculture measures, provide a forum for sharing experiences and information and discuss how to respond to the current and future crisis. Australia looked forward to working with all to formulate the best way forward including the right forum to address those important issues.

8.103. The General Council took note of the statements.

9 PROCEDURAL GUIDELINES FOR WTO COUNCILS AND COMMITTEES ADDRESSING TRADE CONCERNS – STATEMENT BY CO-SPONSORS OF WT/GC/W/777/REV.5

9.1. The Chairman recalled that the delegation of the European Union had requested the Secretariat to add that item in the agenda of that day's meeting.

9.2. The representative of the European Union, on behalf of all co-sponsors of the proposal for "Procedural Guidelines for WTO Councils and Committees Addressing Trade Concerns", gave a brief update of their ongoing efforts to advance the proposal. The co-sponsors had last heard Members' reactions to a revised version of the proposal at the General Council meeting of March shortly before physical meetings had been suspended. They had been encouraged by the positive feedback of many and the readiness to engage of all who had taken the floor. Despite the lockdown, the co-sponsors had had the opportunity to continue their exchange with some Members bilaterally and they thanked them for the constructive conversations.

9.3. Overall, it had been widely acknowledged that the co-sponsors had genuinely endeavoured to address the substantive concerns expressed by Members. In that regard, the European Union would briefly address some recurring comments and touch upon the way forward. The main comments of Members who still had doubts appeared to be that (i) the proposal would somehow "impose" horizontal procedures upon WTO bodies thus disregarding their specificities; and (ii) some of those procedures would jeopardise the neutrality and impartiality of the Chairs and/or the Secretariat and would constrain Members' leeway as to how they could address trade concerns.

9.4. First, only the part on meeting arrangements – i.e. the practicalities of convening meetings and circulating minutes, for example, was drafted to be binding. It was hard to imagine what harm could be done by having a horizontal approach to such issues whereas it would clearly increase predictability and facilitate Members' participation in the discussion of trade concerns. By contrast, the actual guidelines proposed for considering trade concerns in WTO bodies were written in a non-

binding way precisely to allow for flexibility. They were intended as best practices that Members were encouraged to make use of to help them make progress.

9.5. Second, the parts involving the Chairs and the Secretariat in the section "Informal resolution of trade concerns" had also deliberately been crafted to be voluntary and flexible. Actually, the co-sponsors were rather highlighting existing possibilities rather than creating new ones. They would certainly not like to put either the Chairs or the Secretariat in a difficult situation where they would risk overstepping the boundaries of neutrality and impartiality. As had already been mentioned, that Section would be non-binding on Members and was meant to provide them with tools to advance their discussions. The informal processes were meant as a possible complement – and not as a substitute – for debates in WTO bodies. That said, the co-sponsors stood ready to look at suggestions on how those concerns could be accommodated through textual adjustments if necessary.

9.6. The European Union added a comment on the issue of political will. As had been said before, the guidelines would certainly, and unfortunately, not end all concerns. But they could help resolve the "resolvable" trade concerns. Put differently, a framework to encourage dialogue could facilitate engagement in situations where political will could not be obvious immediately. In light of the ever-growing number of persistent trade concerns on various agendas, it was worth trying to do something about them.

9.7. During the past months that had been marked by logistical and organizational challenges due to the lockdown, a number of provisions of the proposal had been de facto implemented in some WTO bodies – for instance focusing statements on the latest developments. The implementation of the whole proposal could have made life easier had they been in force particularly about improved timelines for convening meetings and for circulating documents to be considered at meetings, and a database where all documents pertaining to a trade concern were easily accessible.

9.8. In the coming weeks, the co-sponsors would continue engaging with Members. They were ready to consider any suggestion that could contribute to improve the proposal further. They hoped that the Membership would be able to reach consensus on that proposal before the next Ministerial Conference.

9.9. The representative of Norway was happy to be among the co-sponsors of the proposal. Norway thanked the European Union for its leadership and associated with the statement it made on behalf of the co-sponsors. Improving the efficiency of how Members conducted their daily business in the organization was a high priority for Norway and an important part of the broader reform effort. Streamlining meeting arrangements would improve predictability for all Members, particularly for smaller delegations, easing the challenges related to preparation for and participation in relevant Committees and Bodies of the organization.

9.10. The proposal also highlighted tools and possibilities that could be useful additions to the toolbox that was available to Members on addressing trade concerns. Having more tools available should not be considered as an extra burden but rather as an opportunity. After, when trying to fix something, having a selection of relevant tools available could only be helpful. As the saying went, at least in Norway, "good tools are half the work".

9.11. The representative of Uruguay positively viewed that in Paragraph 6 the term "substantive" had been taken out as an adjective qualifying the description that a Member should provide in order to seek responses from the other party. It was not clear who decided what was substantive and not. That could be considered somewhat restrictively being used as a justification to not present the responses requested. It was also an improvement that Members were not being encouraged to refer to their previous interventions on the record as was currently reflected in Paragraph 11. Members should have the freedom to make use of existing mechanisms in Councils and Committees in order to raise their concerns and express their positions in the way that they deemed relevant.

9.12. Uruguay continued to have doubts surrounding whether a horizontal approach as had been proposed was the most suitable in order to improve the streamlining of the different Councils and Committees each of which had its own specificities, rules and practices for its operations. Similarly, Uruguay reiterated its preference to avoid the accidental effect of having additional requirements upon Members where it came to adding items to the agenda of the different Councils and Committees. Uruguay remained ready to maintain open and constructive dialogue with all interested

Members to improve the functioning of the WTO regular bodies and their results particularly with regard to the effective settlement of the numerous trade concerns submitted to them.

9.13. The representative of the United States recalled that, in the March General Council meeting earlier in the year, the United States had shared its perspectives on necessary elements for effective utilization of Committees, and at that time, had posed several questions to the co-sponsors in an effort to better understand how they had arrived at the recommendations they were suggesting.

9.14. In particular, the United States had sought to better understand why the proponents believed individual Committees lacked the capacity to decide for themselves how best to manage their own meeting arrangements and why the proponents believed that administrative changes would lead to increased political will among Members to use the Committees as had been intended to address ongoing trade concerns. The United States had also requested clarity on why an approach that focused exclusively on trade concerns was appropriate for Committees that had an equal or greater focus on transparency and notification work.

9.15. As one of the most active Members across all WTO Committees, the United States fully supported efforts to rethink and revitalise Members' collective work, both to resolve trade concerns and also to improve and enhance essential transparency and notifications. The United States would welcome greater engagement from the proponents on its questions and concerns and hoped that they would be equally open to understanding the United States' views and perspectives.

9.16. The representative of India supported the need for a mechanism to address specific trade concerns effectively and, in that regard, the proposal to improve the meeting procedures of the WTO bodies. Proposals such as indicative yearly schedules of meetings for each of the WTO bodies, timely circulation of the agenda and the minutes of the meetings and strengthening of the existing processes were welcome.

9.17. The proposal was still being examined in its capital. In the March General Council meeting earlier in the year, India had expressed its preliminary concerns over certain issues. Given the fact that the WTO was a Member-driven organization and neutrality was the core principle embedded in it, Members should be cautious about any enhanced direct role of the Chair of any of the WTO bodies as well as that of the Secretariat in resolving trade concerns between the Members.

9.18. The opportunity to bring up a trade concern in every Committee could prompt Members to raise their concerns frequently across all relevant WTO bodies thereby crowding the agenda of each Committee and putting strain on the precious time of such bodies and the resources of smaller delegations. Further, the requirement of submitting written responses within the strict timeline of 20 days could be burdensome on resource-constrained Members and those with multiple layers of federal structures.

9.19. It was likewise not clear as to whether the oral report of the Chair would involve any interpretation particularly on highly technical issues which could be beyond the capacity of the respective Chair. India had been hoping to discuss the proposal with its co-sponsors but the same could not happen due to the outbreak of the pandemic. India hoped that they could already do that.

9.20. The representative of Brazil reiterated its position that timely and complete notifications were an obligation for all Members – not an option. In that sense, Brazil shared with the proponents of the document the objective of enhancing transparency and strengthening notifications. The proposed horizontal rules should not hinder the specific rules and deadlines already in force in each WTO Council and Committee especially when the specific rules and deadlines could guarantee more transparency and effectiveness. Brazil thanked the efforts of the European Union and co-sponsors in reviewing the proposal once again. Brazil was still analysing those modifications in Brasilia and looked forward to continuing the discussions with the European Union and co-sponsors.

9.21. The representative of Chad, on behalf of the LDCs, welcomed the co-sponsors' spirit of openness, flexibility and being constructive. The LDC Group agreed on the principle of potential benefits of better structuring and better functioning of the Councils and Committees of the WTO seeking to respond to the trade concerns of Members. On that aspect of the WTO reform process, the LDC Group had submitted a communication in December 2019 in particular expressing the fact that changes to procedures concerning Councils and Committees at the WTO should not bring about

any additional burden for LDCs given the constraints they faced in terms of resources both in Geneva and in their respective capitals.

9.22. Among other aspects, the holding of meetings should avoid any potential overlap and the LDCs could not support any tightening of deadlines. For further details on the LDCs' position on the issue of reform, they referred Members to their communication referenced in document JOB/GC/223. The LDC Group welcomed the constructive discussions that they had had with the co-sponsors and remained open for further discussion. The LDCs hoped that the concerns that they had mentioned would be duly taken into account.

9.23. The representative of Turkey noted that the pandemic had shown many ways in which Members could render the WTO Bodies' work more efficient. Examples included limiting remarks to new developments and sharing longer versions to be placed in the minutes or through exchanges of written statements via certain platforms. Turkey echoed what the European Union had mentioned relating to the fact that the proposal was binding in nature only as it concerned meeting arrangements. Having the same procedures in all regular bodies before and after meetings was ideal. A horizontal approach in meeting arrangements would only make everything easier and would avoid possible problems that occurred due to differing procedures.

9.24. Further, the proposal would streamline the functioning of the Committees and Councils and would bring efficiency. For trade concerns, the relevant parts were rather flexible yet any effort that Members could put forward to reach an amicable resolution of a trade concern would be invaluable especially in the current situation of having a paralysed Appellate Body. Moreover, the gathering of Members around the proposal on procedural issues would be the first step in revitalising the negotiating function of the WTO and would demonstrate that the WTO could still deliver. Turkey hoped Members would appreciate the sincere effort in addressing the concerns they had raised so far on the proposal including on moving forward.

9.25. The representative of Chinese Taipei said that, as one of the co-sponsors of the proposal, Chinese Taipei remained eager to work with other Members to improve the process of addressing specific trade concerns including improving the efficiency of the procedures, facilitating the understanding of longstanding issues and providing capacity assistance, among others. If there was a clearer set of principles and guidelines that could be applied horizontally to different Councils and Committees and Members voluntarily took a small step to improve their daily work, it would show Members' determination to strengthen the functioning of the WTO's third pillar in a concrete way which also responded to their urgent appeal of WTO Reform.

9.26. As the European Union had earlier mentioned, during the pandemic, some WTO Committees had taken a flexible approach to convene meetings and had made arrangements concerning the discussion of issues and statements raised by Members in a more efficient manner. They had proof that it would operate well. Chinese Taipei was pleased to see that that was the same direction as the proposal. Chinese Taipei called on more Members to provide comments and support the proposal.

9.27. The representative of Hong Kong, China commended the European Union for leading the efforts concerning the proposal on procedural guidelines and for providing the updates that it had just given. Undoubtedly, the pandemic had caused substantial disruptions to the operations of the organization. As Members navigated the uncertainties of the pandemic, it was perhaps worthwhile to ask themselves whether, when the day-to-day operations of the WTO bodies eventually went back to normal at some point in the future, Members would really want to go about their discussions and deliberations in precisely the way they used to be or would they wish to see improvements in how they handled such matters in terms of efficiency so that they would be better prepared for future storms and challenges.

9.28. The proposal on the table contributed to the broader reform efforts and set out in concrete terms how Members could work to make the WTO's day-to-day operation more efficient. As a co-sponsor, Hong Kong, China reiterated its support for the proposal and encouraged other Members to engage actively in its development.

9.29. The representative of Nigeria noted that there were no substantial differences in the third, fourth and fifth revisions of the proposal. As had been stated in previous General Council meetings, though the proposal contained some good elements, it needed further improvement for it to

effectively enhance the process of addressing trade concerns without necessarily increasing the burden for developing Members. To achieve the desired improvement, the challenges undermining the effectiveness of the vertical procedures currently available in the regular Committees and Councils which necessitated a horizontal procedure should be clarified. Clarifications on the scope of the concerns that could be raised under the proposed procedural guidelines should also be made to guard against Members raising issues that were outside the scope of existing agreements.

9.30. The resource and capacity constraints of developing Members like Nigeria had been further exacerbated by COVID-19. Members should therefore ensure that proposals like that would not directly or inadvertently place huge burden on developing Members that were still grappling with the implementation of existing obligations. The provisions of Paragraph 15 of Rev.5 offered no comfort to developing Members like Nigeria. In view of the foregoing, Nigeria stood ready to further engage proponents of the proposal to explore further flexibilities for developing Members especially LDCs who would most likely encounter difficulties in complying with the guidelines contained in the proposal.

9.31. The representative of South Africa took note of the communication in document WT/GC/W/777/Rev.5. The proposal remained largely the same. Members should be cognizant that the functioning of the WTO system, including the multilateral character of the system, had been carefully negotiated. They should not purport to give new mandates that could upset the delicate balance that had been struck. All fundamentals of the Marrakesh Agreement should be respected with regard to functions of the WTO, decision-making by consensus and amendments to WTO rules.

9.32. If Members wanted those rules to change, they should follow the prescribed rules to amend such. Specific trade concerns were provided for only under certain agreements. The mainstreaming of STCs across all Committees and Councils would likely increase paralysis in the operation of the organization and would negatively impact developing Members who already did not have capacity to cope with the current challenges. South Africa did not therefore believe that horizontal implementation was warranted.

9.33. The manner in which consideration of trade concerns was handled should not impose additional obligations which could result in onerous burdens to Members especially the developing ones and in particular the LDCs with capacity constraints. Encouraging submission of written questions and replies on STCs within a specified period prior to the meeting would overstretch the limited human resource and institutional capacity of such Members.

9.34. South Africa likewise remained concerned about the enhanced role that the proposed draft decision afforded to the Chairpersons of the Councils and Committees including the WTO Secretariat. As had been previously pointed out, South Africa remained concerned that the proposed report of the relevant Chairperson could divert Members' attention away from resolving an STC to a discussion of the Chair's report.

9.35. The representative of Bangladesh associated with the statement made by the LDC Group. To avoid repetition, Bangladesh referred to its previous statement made at the General Council meeting on 3 March which remained valid for that day's meeting. Bangladesh would remain constructively engaged with the proponents and other Members on the issue.

9.36. The representative of Mexico thanked the European Union and co-sponsors for seeking improvements in the procedures of the Committees dealing with trade concerns. That work was however a work in progress which needed more improvements in its fundamental pillars. Mexico would continue to be closely involved with a constructive attitude on that important topic.

9.37. The representative of the European Union thanked all the Members who had provided their views that day. They were useful contributions which the co-sponsors would duly consider moving forward. The European Union felt overall encouraged by the readiness by many to continue the discussions as they shared the overall objective to improve the day to day work of the WTO Bodies. The co-sponsors would continue to engage with the view to reaching a consensus on the proposal as soon as possible.

9.38. The General Council took note of the statements.

10 PROCEDURES TO STRENGTHEN THE NEGOTIATING FUNCTION OF THE WTO – STATEMENT BY THE UNITED STATES (WT/GC/W/757/REV.1 AND WT/GC/W/764/REV.1)

10.1. The Chairman recalled that the item was included in the agenda by the delegation of the United States together with the document WT/GC/W/757/Rev.1 and the revised communication in document WT/GC/W/764/Rev.1.

10.2. The representative of the United States continued to give voice to a proposition that, not long ago, had only been whispered in Geneva: that the Membership's collective inability to differentiate among self-declared developing Members had severely undermined the negotiating function of the WTO. To resolve the problem, the United States had tabled a proposal to reform eligibility for blanket special and differential treatment in current and future WTO negotiations.

10.3. During previous meetings, the United States had provided its perspectives on two of the four criteria in the US reform proposal: OECD membership and G20 membership. That day, the United States briefly provided its views on the other two criteria: High Income, as classified by the World Bank, and Share of Global Merchandise Trade of greater than 0.5 percent.

10.4. The United States had included the High-Income classification as a criteria because those economies simply had many more resources at their disposal than the poorest among them, on a per capita basis. More should be expected of those Members because they had more. Yet, still that day, five of the top 11 wealthiest economies in the world had not renounced seeking S&DT in current and future WTO negotiations.

10.5. The fourth criteria, share of global merchandise trade, was intuitively obvious. Those Members were trade powerhouses. As a result of their enormous trade volumes, they had tremendous skin in the game. Each of them – with no exceptions – had the capacity and experience to defend its interests at the negotiating table. It was unfair that those Members could ask for the same blanket S&DT that was intended to assist smaller, poorer and less integrated Members.

10.6. The United States was carefully considering some constructive feedback that it had received just before the pandemic reached its shores. The United States would come back to Members on its proposal very soon. The US S&DT proposal remained fundamental to its vision for WTO reform and it was not going away. For that day's discussion, and given the length of time since Members had last discussed the issue, the United States briefly outlined why S&DT reform remained necessary.

10.7. Since the creation of the WTO in 1995, a large number of self-declared developing Members had significantly differentiated themselves from other Members particularly LDCs and Sub-Saharan African Members across a wide range of development-related indicators. However, that greater differentiation was not reflected in how they negotiated. Other international institutions had attempted to adjust to the new reality, but the WTO remained anchored to a world that no longer existed.

10.8. Some relatively advanced, wealthy or influential Members insisted on having access to S&DT in current and future WTO negotiations even though they had the capacity and experience to defend their interests at the negotiating table. Those Members believed that only some obligations should apply to them while all obligations should apply to a small handful of Members.

10.9. That was not consistent with the desire that Members had expressed in the preamble to the Marrakesh Agreement Establishing the World Trade Organization, to enter into "reciprocal and mutually advantageous arrangements directed to the substantial reduction of tariffs and other barriers to trade and to the elimination of discriminatory treatment in international trade relations".

10.10. Unfortunately, trade agreements that could open new opportunities for relatively poor Members and deepen their integration into the global trading system did not materialise because a good portion of the relatively advanced, wealthy or influential economies refused to be bound by future WTO rules and commitments. By demanding the same flexibilities as much smaller, poorer Members, relatively advanced, wealthy, or influential Members created asymmetries that ensured that ambition levels in WTO negotiations remained far too weak to sustain viable outcomes.

10.11. Members could not find mutually agreeable trade-offs or build coalitions when significant players exploited S&DT eligibility to avoid making meaningful offers or to refuse new disciplines. Even if new agreements had been possible, the benefits of blanket S&DT for LDCs and other relatively poor Members would tend to be diluted by relatively advanced, wealthy or influential Members receiving the same treatment.

10.12. For those reasons, the United States continued to believe that the WTO faced a stark choice: reform or irrelevance. The United States looked forward to continuing its on-going conversations with Members on their ideas for how they could advance that proposal and strengthen the negotiating function of the WTO.

10.13. The representative of Brazil said that S&DT had been a point of intense debate at the General Council and the stalemate continued. To find a way forward, Members should focus on the technical aspects of S&DT. Members should recognise that S&DT was, by its very nature, flexible, varied and evolving. Not only had it already evolved in the GATT/WTO system, but it also took different shapes depending on the agreements and to the level of development of Members.

10.14. For instance, the Agreement on Safeguards provided exemptions for developing countries depending on the level of their exports. In the TRIPS and other Agreements, there were provisions for longer timeframes in the implementation of commitments. The TFA allowed developing countries to secure the provision of technical assistance to facilitate their compliance. It was also clear that development was not to be identified with S&DT. Although they were closely interlinked concepts, it was essential to distinguish the S&DT discussions from the larger development debate. S&DT was only a tool to foster development. It was not development itself.

10.15. It was clear that there were significant differences in capacity among developing countries. Some needed S&DT more than others. For those that were not in a position to forego the instrument, the use of S&DT should be precise to address the specific sensitivities and needs of developing countries focusing on those with the greatest needs. Brazil had decided to begin to forego the use of S&DT in current and future WTO negotiations. As a matter of fairness, Brazil urged Members to look at their true needs, to recall that policy space required fiscal space and to provide room for those developing countries especially the LDCs who needed S&DT the most.

10.16. The representative of China recalled the saying, "There is nothing more unequal than the equal treatment of unequal people." It actually did not matter whether the saying was attributed to Mr. Thomas Jefferson or to someone else. What really mattered was that it was the truth. When that truth applied in the context of the WTO it meant that in an international organization with developed and developing Members, non-reciprocity was a means and a principle to realise equity.

10.17. Developing Members, big or small, had similar history. They had been oppressed and bullied for a long time in history with the tendency of lagging behind again for a long time after gaining independence. Currently, they were still in a state of catching up for another long and difficult time. Believe it or not, those long times were the most common characteristics of all developing countries. Asking a large number of developing Members to accept the same rules with developed Members would only lead the WTO to lose its equity.

10.18. From China's perspective, the reality was that almost half of China's population barely earned USD 5 per day which of course made China a developing country. There was an indivisible relationship between developing country status and S&DT. As long as a country was a developing one, small or large, naturally the country faced various constraints and limitations. As such, it was inevitable that the country would claim S&DT in some areas. For instance, China and India had a large number of subsistence farmers and they were very disadvantaged and vulnerable to compete with the developed countries' large scale commercial farmers – not to mention the fact that China had not at all enjoyed full S&DT under the Agreement on Agriculture.

10.19. The excessive agriculture subsidies enjoyed by the developed countries made things even worse. So, it was a natural conclusion that further eroding their S&DT right while developed countries rejected reducing their subsidies was not fair. S&DT was an institutional right of developing Members which they would not give up. But it did not mean they wanted to take the benefit everywhere. China was ready to assume more responsibility and make a greater contribution in the WTO. China had never placed itself in the same position as Benin and Liberia. China would do what it could, and

it would be honest and would tell the truth if it could not. Nonetheless, China could not agree that others deprived it of its S&DT right up-front.

10.20. China had taken such a pragmatic and constructive approach ever since its accession to the WTO. To illustrate, in the TFA, 94.5% of its commitment fell under Category A – immediately implemented upon entry into force of the TFA. Only four items belonged to Category B – implemented after transitional period following the TFA's entry into force. China had honoured its promise and had fully implemented all Category B measures within three years after entry into force of the agreement. In the WTO domestic regulation negotiations, China had also done its part by submitting an indicative draft schedule of specific commitments which covered all the commitment sectors opting out special treatment including the transitional period.

10.21. Reclassification was not a way out. The pragmatic way on S&DT was to respect the current practice of self-designation and respect the institutional right of the developing Members, and at the same time, to encourage those in a position to do so to make a greater contribution to the best of their capabilities. China was willing to do so.

10.22. The representative of Australia welcomed the ongoing discussion on S&DT which it agreed was an important element of Members' collective efforts to strengthen and modernise the WTO. Australia remained committed to fostering all Members' participation in global trade especially if they sought to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, in the current climate of economic instability, Members' commitment to open, rules-based trade should be stronger than ever. Australia recognised the value of S&DT in supporting developing country Members especially LDCs to integrate into the multilateral trading system.

10.23. As Australia had said before, S&DT should not however be an end in itself. Rather, it was part of a broader set of tools available to assist Members to move towards full implementation of WTO Agreements. Members' needs clearly differed including on particular issues. So, S&DT should be tailored on a needs basis enabling Members to make commitments commensurate with their capacity to do so. Australia would continue to work with Members to find appropriate solutions to S&DT in current and future negotiations and looked forward to participating further in that important discussion.

10.24. The representative of the European Union said that development was a central pillar of the organization. The current distinction between developed and developing countries no longer reflected the reality of the rapid economic growth in some developing countries. Members should therefore continue to work on special and differential treatment with a view to ensuring that flexibilities were made available to those Members who actually needed them to enable them to fully benefit from their membership in the organization.

10.25. If the organization was to prosper, S&DT should become much more granular, in function of an individual Member's demonstrated needs and capacities. Future differentiation should be designed in terms of specific individual country needs at the sectoral or activity level rather than calling for a block exemption of a large category of Members. Furthermore, the European Union considered that each developing country Member's need for S&DT should be assessed on a case-by-case basis and be evidence-based. The notable exception should be the LDCs who deserved particular treatment and who in any case had a graduation mechanism.

10.26. The European Union was open to looking into S&DT provisions in future agreements such as the ongoing negotiations on fisheries subsidies. The European Union expected to have a discussion with Members as to what development concern was raised by the provisions under discussion and what flexibility was necessary in order to eventually allow the affected Members to fully implement the agreement. It was only where S&DT responded to a specific need that it could be truly effective. In that context, the European Union called on advanced WTO Members claiming developing country status to undertake full commitments in ongoing and future WTO negotiations. As had been mentioned previously, that should particularly be the case for members of the G20 which represented the world's most important economies.

10.27. The representative of Chad, on behalf of the LDCs, welcomed the flexibility and the constructive spirit of the United States in the discussions and exchanges they had on the matter. The LDCs also welcomed the fact that the United States remained sensitive to the concerns of the

most vulnerable Members of the organization including the LDCs. In that regard, the LDC Group had had the opportunity to express itself on the important issue of S&DT during the previous meeting of the General Council and more generally in other WTO bodies.

10.28. The LDC Group reiterated how essential S&DT was for developing Members including LDCs in order to give them the means to economically catch up to promote the lifting of the majority of their population from poverty and to allow them to embark on a path towards a fairer, more equitable and more inclusive multilateral trading system. The principle of S&DT was an integral part of the WTO and of its agreements. The WTO had been founded in part on that basis and that should remain a development instrument for those Members that really needed it.

10.29. The representative of India referred to the submission in document WT/GC/W/765 by India and some other Members where they had dealt with most of the issues raised by the United States in their paper. They had underlined that S&DT was a treaty embedded right at the WTO and that it could not be taken away based on certain arbitrary assumptions. In fact, S&DT should continue to underpin existing rules as well as current and future negotiations if Members were to strengthen the negotiating function of the WTO.

10.30. The COVID-19 crisis was a powerful reminder of the world's inter-connectedness and no Member was reliably insulated from a highly contagious virus as long as it persisted anywhere in the world. It was however critical to bear in mind that the negative effects of the pandemic were being felt unevenly. The strain on economic, food and livelihood security was disproportionately impacting developing and LDC Members with large populations, large share of global poor and limited resources. They could be facing the same storm, but certainly, they were not in the same boat.

10.31. India once again highlighted that the draft decision used parameters, many of them unrelated to development, to target certain Members. While some developing Members could have made progress, old development gaps persisted, and in some areas had even widened. Moreover, new divides, especially in the digital and technological spheres, had emerged and were becoming more pronounced. The COVID-19 pandemic had further amplified that divide. Almost half of the world's population did not have access to high speed broadband and was hence deprived of the access to use of digital platforms for sourcing goods and services, telemedicine, e-education and electronic payments. The S&DT in favour of developing and LDC Members had never been more relevant at any time in the past than in present circumstances. In fact, the existing S&DT provisions needed to be strengthened and made more precise, effective and operational in line with the mandate under Paragraph 44 of the Doha Declaration. India supported the comprehensive submission made by the G-90 in that regard and hoped that Members would engage constructively on the G-90 proposal.

10.32. The basis of S&DT was to give Members time and flexibility to integrate into the rules-based system. Members with huge differences in economic and social development could not be put in the same category. For instance, to put India, which had an annual per capita income of less than USD 2,500, in the same development category as the United States, with a much higher, about 25 times, per capita GDP, would be unfair.

10.33. There had been repeated assertions by the Member that the draft decision for the General Council related only to S&DT in the current and future negotiations and not under the existing WTO Agreements. However, there had been unilateral denying of S&DT to developing Members even under the existing WTO Agreements like Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures and the Agreement on Safeguards.

10.34. Certain recent actions fuelled India's apprehensions that the ultimate objective of the submission was to ultimately terminate S&DT at the WTO altogether. To that end, a so-called case-by-case approach was being proposed, dependent on providing evidence of the need for S&DT, sector wise to start with, which would soon expand to requesting for and seeking S&DT, product-by-product and line-by-line. Such an approach would be so burdensome and impractical that it would make S&DT for developing and LDC Members extinct and a part of history of the WTO. Members should not allow that to happen and India urged the Member to reconsider its proposal.

10.35. The representative of Colombia recalled the statement delivered by his delegation under that agenda item during the General Council meeting of 3 March. Colombia, as a developing country,

understood the concerns of the United States about the impact that the inadequate use of S&DT could have in the negotiating function of the WTO and believed that that technical discussion should not be tied up with the broader and more political one concerning the status of economic development of WTO Members. The future and adequate use of S&DT provisions was a very important issue and Colombia acknowledged the responsibility that lay upon all of Members to have that discussion.

10.36. Colombia therefore welcomed the opportunity of discussing that issue in an open and transparent manner in the pursuit of a greater systemic goal. Having said that, unilateral actions in that regard created great difficulty for many Members to engage fully and with a technical perspective in that topic and would not contribute to a long-term solution. Instead, it could have a counter-effect politicising further the discussion resulting ultimately in the weakening and not strengthening of the negotiating function of the WTO. With all those in mind, Colombia stood ready to engage in an open and transparent dialogue with all Members on that important topic.

10.37. The representative of the Russian Federation noted that the differences in Members' views on S&DT reform and on its adaptation to reality were not just a problem per se. It was a significant obstacle for advancing negotiations on several important tracks. So, the continuous efforts of the United States to bring Members' attention to that issue was quite understandable. The Russian Federation called upon all Members to aim at finding a solution on the issue as soon as possible. The Russian Federation however echoed what Colombia had said that that solution should be a result of negotiations among Members rather than a decision or set of decisions imposed unilaterally. The capability of Members to implement provisions of new agreements both plurilateral and multilateral should be duly taken into account and reflected. The needs of the poorest Members should be continued to be respected and preferences for LDCs were evidently beyond question.

10.38. The representative of South Africa associated with the statement to be made by the ACP. South Africa recalled the submission that it had co-sponsored with China, India, and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela in document WT/GC/W/765 and it continued to be its response on the issue. The mandate Members had on S&DT was in accordance with Paragraph 44 of the Doha Ministerial Declaration and it was to strengthen S&DT provisions to make them precise, effective and operational. That was where Members should be focusing their energies. The G-90 had tabled its revised proposal in document JOB/DEV/60 – JOB/TNC/79 and had provided comprehensive inputs through document JOB/DEV/61 to questions by Members.

10.39. S&DT in the WTO was an essential feature of various WTO agreement provisions. The preamble to the Marrakesh Agreement Establishing the WTO encouraged "positive efforts" to ensure that developing countries "secure a share in the growth of international trade commensurate with the needs of their economic development". Those positive efforts took the legal form of provisions on S&DT which were recognised under the Doha Declaration to be "an integral part of the WTO Agreements". That principle had been observed in all the negotiations in the WTO. Taking the same commitments as developed countries would not promote trade justice and would not strengthen the negotiating function and could actually constrain it. The G-90 had been constructively participating in the S&DT negotiations as per the mandate of the Doha Ministerial Decision.

10.40. Developing countries were going to be disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic especially in Africa. The pandemic had exposed fundamental weaknesses in the global system. It had shown how poverty, weak health systems, lack of education and a lack of global cooperation exacerbated the crisis. The pandemic was exacerbated by lack of progress in achieving SDG targets such as clean water and sanitation targets (SDG 6), weak economic growth and the absence of decent work (SDG 8), pervasive inequalities (SDG 10), and above all, entrenched poverty (SDG 1) and food insecurity (SDG 2) which were more prevalent in developing countries.

10.41. One hundred million more people could be pushed into extreme poverty in 2020. The world could see famines of historic proportions. Economic activity across the world had plummeted, unemployment had soared, and inequality and poverty were expected to rise to record levels. In the case of South Africa, the unemployment rate had risen to 30.1%. International support currently on offer was not sufficient to meet the needs of developing countries. COVID-19 highlighted the urgent need for strengthening S&DT provisions which were critical to promote public health, accelerate industrialization, promote technology transfer and close the digital divide which was critical to promote an inclusive digital economy. The G-90 proposals articulated those aspects.

10.42. S&DT was one of the key principles of the WTO provided to developing countries to adjust to trade rules at their pace and in accordance with their level of development. That principle and right should be preserved and was central to the integration of developing countries in global trade and in promoting a fair and equitable multilateral trading system. S&DT and access to it could not be based on some arbitrary criteria that did not recognise the real development challenges and the growing development divide between developing and developed countries.

10.43. The representative of Jamaica, on behalf of the ACP Group, reiterated the concerns of the ACP Group that the proposal had predefined criteria which relied on the conceptualization of development that were not in accordance with the realities of Members. That was quite evident in the context of COVID-19 which continued to disproportionately affect Members. The use of criteria to deprive developing Members S&DT especially at that time would be severely damaging. Paragraph 44 of the Doha Ministerial Declaration had envisaged the strengthening of S&DT provisions making them more precise, effective and operational. It did not call for an elimination of S&DT.

10.44. The ACP Group was particularly concerned about any movement of the WTO in a direction that sought to classify Members based on pre-defined criteria conceptualised outside of the WTO without a thorough assessment and accommodation of the realities that lay behind the coated number. It could create unintended consequences for some developing Members that were arbitrarily excluded up-front from S&DT in WTO Agreements when internal conditions required those flexibilities. Even before COVID-19, many of the ACP members had been facing economic downturn and an increase in levels of poverty making the achievement of SDGs more difficult.

10.45. The UNHRC Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights had emphasised that the world was at an existential crossroad involving a pandemic, a deep economic recession, devastating climate change and extreme inequality. He pointed out that COVID-19 was projected to push more than 70 million additional persons into extreme poverty and hundreds of millions more into unemployment and poverty. That was but one example of how a staggeringly low standard of living was imposed on developing countries and by extension affected the achievement of the SDGs.

10.46. The draft decision in document WT/GC/W/764/Rev.1 would disenfranchise developing Members by excluding treaty embedded rights and flexibilities even before negotiations began. The draft decision went against the principle of S&DT which was enshrined in the Marrakesh Agreement and which was an integral part of all WTO Agreements. Members who chose to opt out of S&DT or to voluntarily self-declare that they did not require flexibilities were free to do so. Since negotiations on S&DT were going on in the CTD SS, the ACP Group hoped that the United States would engage further on its ideas in that forum.

10.47. The G-90 had recently updated its S&DT proposal contained in document JOB/DEV/60 – JOB/TNC/79 dated 9 March. The G-90 had also submitted its written responses to the questions of Members on 24 June in document JOB/DEV/61 entitled "Consolidated Responses on Comments and Questions from Members and on the G-90 Submission". The ACP Group looked forward to Members' active engagement in the CTD SS which was the mandated body to consider issues of development and S&DT.

10.48. The representative of Japan said that it was more pressing than ever for all Members to engage in its reform and modernising S&DT was a significant component of the reform. In that regard, Japan appreciated the United States for putting forward that important issue. The continued use of S&DT by self-declared developing Members that had achieved significant economic development hindered those Members that really needed it from utilising appropriate level of benefits from S&DT by diluting effects of the adjustment of the comparative advantage that S&DT originally aimed to provide. Japan welcomed recent decisions by those Members to forego S&DT. The increasing number of Members that had decided to forego S&DT was a positive trend. It contributed to the WTO Reform as Members prepared for MC12 reflecting the reality of the 21st century and to further enhancing free and fair trade.

10.49. The representative of Turkey noted that, as a strong supporter of the multilateral trading system, Turkey was ready to contribute to any discussion aimed at strengthening the negotiating function of the organization. Members should keep in mind that development was a sensitive and critical issue for many of them. Full implementation of WTO Agreements as well as increased participation by Members into world trade were crucial for an effective multilateral trading system.

Any outcome of discussions should be inclusive so that trade among Members could result in economic growth and development. As Turkey had repeatedly emphasised, categorization of Members solely by relying on either their Membership to certain organizations or any selective and arbitrary data would not help them take their discussion forward. Members should also order their priorities well and refocus their efforts to negotiating topics.

10.50. The representative of Mexico We are aware of the rebalancing of parameters that has been mentioned. We are open to a technical constructive conversation on topics that affect the effectiveness of our negotiations hoping that this is entered into pragmatically and bearing in mind very clearly that this organization provides flexibilities for those who need them. Furthermore, both the United States and the European Union made mention of Members of the G20 as one of the categories. We would like to recall that South Africa, Indonesia and Mexico are in that grouping – economies that could, from a neutral perspective, very difficulty perceived as developed. The economic impact of COVID-19 will surely reduce the income per capita of our economies furthermore between 10 and 15 per cent.

10.51. The representative of Cameroon associated with the statement made by the African Group and the ACP. Cameroon thanked the proponents for proposing those tests particularly the United States and took note of the legitimacy of the US paper and the concerns that the United States had raised to all Members as indicated in its submissions. Cameroon however drew attention to the fact that S&DT was a right. It was an undeniable right and had been for a long time. Although any party was entitled to question at any given time the exercise of a right, that did not change the fact that S&DT was a legitimate right that should be expressed as such. Furthermore, the issue should be examined holistically together with a package of other points that could facilitate elements of reform necessary for the organization to truly respond to the needs and expectations of all Members.

10.52. The G-90 had submitted a number of concerns that had not, to date, been addressed. Members currently had an opportunity to give a satisfactory response to all of those questions to bring about a calmer environment for discussion. That environment was necessary to move forward on the basis of consensus pragmatically, realistically and effectively to respond to the different essential points. Cameroon remained at the side of all delegations in finding a response that was based on consensus and that would be satisfactory. Cameroon stood ready to facilitate all discussions in that vein and remained open to hear legitimate concerns of all particularly of developing Members.

10.53. The representative of the United States thanked delegations for their comments and their engagement. That was no doubt a difficult issue, but it was a very important one. The United States saw it as an essential element of WTO reform. The United States supported S&DT for LDCs and developing Members who were most in need. The United States did not ask any developing country to call itself a developed country nor did it object to any country from negotiating flexibilities for itself in any negotiation. What the United States did object to was the claim of certain advanced economies, some of the world's largest trading nations, to blanket S&DT as of right and that situation had unfortunately had a very negative impact on the negotiating function at the WTO. The United States looked forward to continuing that conversation with Members in the days and months ahead.

10.54. The General Council took note of the statements.

11 STATEMENT ON THE IMPORTANCE OF MARKET-ORIENTED CONDITIONS TO THE WORLD TRADING SYSTEM – UNITED STATES

11.1. The Chairman noted that the item was included in the agenda by the United States and invited the United States to introduce it.

11.2. The representative of the United States said that the United States and Brazil had requested the agenda item to continue addressing the importance of market-oriented conditions to the global trading system. As a result of their work together, Brazil and the United States had released a joint statement that reflected the importance they attached to market-oriented conditions for the world trading system. The statement further elaborated the draft General Council decision previously circulated.

11.3. The joint Brazil-US Statement reflected their shared values as WTO Members and their recognition of fundamental issues that supported the trading system. Brazil and the United States

jointly affirmed that market-oriented conditions were fundamental to a free, fair and mutually advantageous world trading system. They likewise affirmed a number of criteria that reflected the market-oriented conditions and disciplines to which their own enterprises were subjected to and that all Members' enterprises should operate under those conditions to ensure a level playing field for their citizens, workers and businesses.

11.4. The United States and Brazil continued to welcome the support and engagement of Members who wished to become co-sponsors of the statement. To that end, they were willing to discuss the statement with any delegation who could have questions about it. In the time since the United States had first introduced the draft General Council Decision on market-oriented conditions, in March, much had changed. But Members were still faced with the same basic questions the United States had posed at that meeting: (i) "What is the purpose of this organization?" and (ii) "What values do we uphold?"

11.5. For the United States, the WTO was and should be a place where countries came together to work towards developing and enforcing rules that promoted the common goal of free and fair trade on the basis of openness and market principles. That reflected the long-held understanding that the WTO had been established to promote Member economies' participation in a world trading system "based on open, market-oriented policies and the commitments set out in the Uruguay Round Agreements and Decisions".

11.6. When Members had opened their economies to competition through the WTO, they had done so with a shared understanding that market-oriented conditions would take hold in each of their economies and that would ensure a level playing field for that competition to take place. The market-based reform efforts of many GATT parties and WTO acceding Members reflected that shared understanding that market-oriented conditions were essential for Members to fully benefit from the reciprocal and mutually advantageous commitments that they had undertaken. Yet more recently, non-market-oriented policies and practices had been working against that collective goal, creating unfair competitive conditions that hurt other Members' workers and businesses.

11.7. As the United States saw it, some of the key elements that indicated that market-oriented conditions existed for market participants were: (i) Decisions of enterprises on prices, costs, inputs, purchases, and sales were freely determined and made in response to market signals; (ii) Enterprise decisions on investments were freely determined and made in response to market signals; (iii) The prices of capital, labour, technology, and other factors were market-determined; (iv) Capital allocation decisions of or affecting enterprises were freely determined and made in response to market signals; (v) Enterprises were subject to internationally-recognised accounting standards, including independent accounting; (vi) Enterprises were subject to market-oriented and effective corporation law, bankruptcy law, competition law and private property law and could enforce their rights through impartial legal processes such as an independent judicial system; and (vii) Enterprises were able to access freely relevant information on which to base their business decisions.

11.8. Moreover, in all of those areas, there should be no significant government interference in enterprise business decisions. When workers and businesses in each Member's economy were subject to those market constraints and disciplines, they competed on a level playing field. But when a Member's non-market policies and practices shielded its producers from those market constraints and disciplines, it conferred an advantage that was fundamentally unfair. Simply put, if workers and businesses were subjected to market constraints and disciplines, it was fundamentally unfair to force them to compete with another Member's enterprises that were not subject to those same constraints and disciplines.

11.9. In the March General Council meeting discussion, some Members had misunderstood the draft Decision and had drawn a false equivalence between market-oriented conditions and a rejection of governance altogether. But of course that was not the case. The proposed elements themselves recognised the importance of effective corporation law, bankruptcy law, competition law and private property law. However, when the state put its thumb – or even its fist – on the scale to distort competition and drive preferred outcomes to benefit certain domestic actors, that was unfair.

11.10. Conversely, Members had witnessed recent interventions as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. While those interventions should be temporary, the underlying importance of market-

oriented conditions had not changed. What the United States was concerned with was ensuring fair competition and a level playing field – not interfering with the ability to govern.

11.11. There were others who appeared to recognise the value of market orientation but then asserted that efforts to affirm that value were intended to interfere with government regulation or prevent interventions to address market failures. That understanding however was incorrect. The importance of market-oriented conditions was not about interfering with government policies but rather was concerned with ensuring equality between market participants.

11.12. Indeed, following the discussion of the draft General Council Decision the United States had introduced earlier in the year, Brazil and the United States had taken into account the reflections shared with them by other Members so that they could be clear about their values. In the joint statement, they had made clear that, "We recognize the importance of a Member's right and ability to regulate in the public's interest, promoting the public's welfare and helping to establish a level playing field for all market participants."

11.13. Still others appeared to take the position that market-oriented conditions were not important as if they did not want to provide a level playing field for other Members. If that was the case, the discussion was even more important to have. Those Members should explain how they could have a level playing field if some Members offered market-oriented conditions, but others did not.

11.14. Indeed, the United States viewed the discussion as necessary to make progress towards the WTO reform Members had all been discussing. To build confidence in the organization as promoting free and fair trade, WTO Members should discuss and reinforce their commitment to market-oriented values. At a time when much was beyond their ability to change, taking that step together to reaffirm the importance of market-oriented conditions for the world trading system was something Members could do – and should do – if they wanted to maintain the continued vitality and the very relevance of the WTO.

11.15. The representative of Brazil noted that Brazil had decided to table with the United States a statement on the importance of market-oriented conditions to the world trading system because it firmly believed that that was the time for reform and that renewal for horizontal disciplines that level the playing field were more important now more than ever. Members would not be able to move forward with the necessary and urgent WTO reform unless they re-committed to the principles and goals upon which they had established the organization and the multilateral trading system.

11.16. The WTO should be prepared to live up to its foundational principles which were there to foster international trade as a driving force of economic growth, prosperity and development. The Marrakesh Declaration reminded Members that open and market-oriented policies were at the heart of the WTO. In 1994, there had been a common desire to upgrade to an open and fair multilateral trading system. There had been a common understanding that that had been for the benefit and welfare of all. Members should ensure that its basic agreements remained strong and effective.

11.17. The joint statement stressed the importance of enterprises operating under market-oriented conditions and noted elements indicating that market-oriented conditions existed. In considering such elements, one should take into account national business circumstances. Brazil's strategic objective in tabling the declaration was clearly and solely connected to the reform of the WTO. Agreeing on basic principles was the surest path to a renewed and strong organization and the verifiability and effectiveness of the multilateral trading system in the long run.

11.18. True support to the WTO equalled support to market-oriented policies and fairness in international trade. Brazil was willing to work with WTO Members to strengthen its collective commitment to such policies in order to ensure a level playing field for all – big and small, developed and developing. Brazil sincerely hoped the statement would reenergise Members' collective commitment to economic freedom which was a fundamental pillar of the WTO.

11.19. The representative of China said that the standards of market economy was a topic of interest to him but not within the framework of the WTO. Some years ago, he had gone to Boston on a special trip as a visiting scholar to meet Professor Dwight Perkins who was a renowned economist from Harvard University. His book entitled "Agricultural Development in China: 1368-1968" was a must read for college students. He had had an insightful conversation with him on the

issue of market economy. He had told him that it would take at least one school semester to explain what a market economy really was, and the conclusion would still lead to no definite definition or standard.

11.20. The WTO had its clear mandate and scope of responsibility. Members did not have the luxury to pursue such an academic endeavour because the WTO was not and should not be an academic organization. The world trading system was based on open, market policies and the commitments set out in the Uruguay Round Agreements and Decisions. That was why Members should focus on addressing policy measures that were clearly contrary to the market principles. For example, Members should discuss how to effectively deal with governments' forced repatriation of global supply chains and protectionist measures in the disguise of national security. While the definition of market economy could sound intriguing to the academia, it was not easier for the WTO. Instead, Members should focus on what the WTO was mandated to do, should be doing, and was capable of doing.

11.21. The representative of Australia welcomed the joint statement by the United States and Brazil on one of the founding principles of the organization. Australia shared the view that the WTO represented a fundamental commitment by Members to an open trading environment underpinned by market-oriented principles. Australia stood ready to contribute to constructive discussion with all Members on that and other basic principles of the WTO to ensure that the organization remained fit for purpose and further contributed to liberalising global trade.

11.22. The representative of Nigeria noted that unlike the March General Council meeting when the issue had been tabled as a draft General Council decision as contained in document WT/GC/W/796, the joint statement that day was perhaps presented in a manner that would foster discussions and enable Members to gain greater insight into the meaning of market-oriented conditions and their importance to the world trading system. As it had stated in March, Nigeria had concerns on the likely scope of the issue and its potential implication on the right of the State to regulate economic activities within its own sovereign territory especially during market failures.

11.23. Nigeria's assessment of existing market-oriented models in some liberal and market-driven economies depicted a system of massive subsidy schemes that provided financial support to prop up domestic producers and enterprises. Those policies continued to undermine the competitiveness of producers in most developing countries with limited fiscal space to provide support.

11.24. Under the current COVID-19 pandemic, while most African States had extremely tight fiscal space to provide support for their industries, their developed partners were able to roll out robust stimulus packages as high as USD 2 trillion in some cases for their industries. In fact, that week, in order to speed up economic recovery, EU leaders had been able to strike a deal that brought the EU total stimulus package to EUR 1.8 trillion. That was also the case with virtually all liberal and market-driven economies.

11.25. The question therefore focused on how Members should situate those developments in WTO discussions on market-oriented conditions and their importance to the world trading system. Nigeria thanked the United States for its statement and stood ready to further discuss the issue with the United States and other Members to gain greater insight.

11.26. The representative of the European Union thought it was important that businesses operated under market-oriented conditions and had repeatedly expressed its concerns with non-market-oriented policies and practices that had resulted in damage to the world trading system and a lack of level playing field. The aim of the European Union's work, in particular in the context of the trilateral cooperation, had been to identify the negative spill-overs into the trading system that could result from non-market based economic practices.

11.27. That kind of reflection would allow for the identification of the kinds of future rules that could help address and minimise the impact of those negative spill-overs. That was the process the European Union was going through in the field of industrial subsidies for example where having reflected on the kinds of rules needed, the European Union was beginning to discuss its ideas with other Members.

11.28. The representative of Norway agreed that it was useful from time to time and in particular in challenging times like what the world was living through right now to remind themselves, the Members, why they had the WTO and to recall the principles that represented the foundation of the organization. The Preamble of the Marrakesh Agreement talked about the objective being raising standards of living, ensuring full employment and allowing for the optimal use of the world's resources in accordance with the objective of sustainable development. The preamble also indicated how that was going to be achieved namely by "substantial reduction of tariffs and other barriers to trade and the elimination of discriminatory treatment in international trade relations".

11.29. While those examples by no means constituted an exhaustive list of objectives and principles found in the agreements, they did however convey the core vision of the organization that trade was an enabler for social and economic development and that trade liberalization based on principles of non-discrimination was the principal instrument by which their objectives were met. That said, the agreements Members had entered into allowed for a good deal of flexibility on the basis of pre-existing conditions and capabilities as well as policy objectives.

11.30. Since the founding of GATT, the multilateral trading system had accommodated a great deal of variations in terms of commitments and in terms of legal, economic, social and political systems. While the WTO multilateral agreements could accommodate variations of economic systems, Members should always be able to discuss whether those variations were in line with the fundamental principles of the organization.

11.31. Members knew that the magnitude and direction of government interventions and other behind the border measures could have great impact on international trade. Transparency about such measures was key to ensure that the principles were followed. Norway therefore posed the question on whether there was full transparency on how governments and businesses operated so that it could be established with certainty that practices were non-discriminatory. If not, Norway asked whether there could be something done to improve transparency. If there was a need to amend agreements in order to ensure that basic principles were followed, then Members should talk about it. Because there was only one way to amend the rules of the game and that was through negotiations – multilateral negotiations.

11.32. The representative of Switzerland noted that the text set out a number of principles that should govern the functioning of a market economy. Looking at the WTO, Switzerland considered that many principles upon which the organization was built were supportive of a market-oriented economy. Those principles were anchored in the preamble and the letter and spirit of the WTO Agreements. Indeed, the WTO aimed at securing a progressively more open trading environment. Its agreements acted as a lubricant for market forces despite the differences between Members in their economic models and their level of development.

11.33. Well-functioning markets also needed intergovernmental cooperation to define the rules under which economic agents were operating. That was precisely what the WTO provided to its Members: a forum to work together on global trade issues. Furthermore, by incorporating non-discrimination into their fabric, WTO agreements ensured that economic operators faced fairer competition conditions on the global market.

11.34. Other key principles of the WTO blueprint were ingredients of well-functioning markets. In that regard, Switzerland underlined transparency in the way Members managed their commitments and the measures affecting trade, predictability achieved through the respect of rules and commitments taken by Members and legal security provided by the binding adjudication of disputes.

11.35. Those principles constituted the 'global commons' that framed the multilateral trading system. Reinforcing and making those principles more operational was certainly a key factor of the reform. Among others, improving the transparency and monitoring of trade policy measures was a case in point. The COVID-19 crisis had shown the usefulness of the monitoring work by the Secretariat and of timely and comprehensive notifications to help governments respond to disrupted trade.

11.36. The principles that Switzerland had characterized as 'global commons' should also inspire Members when addressing the challenges that the WTO was facing in curbing overfishing and making trade and environment mutually supportive, keeping pace with technological development in the

digital environment, differentiating the commitments made by Members in accordance with their capacities to contribute to the system and updating the rules governing international trade to ensure equal competitive conditions, among others.

11.37. The representative of the United Kingdom said that the WTO Agreements as had been agreed by the Membership recognised the importance of market-oriented conditions to the world trading system. Members sought to ensure fair competition by guaranteeing all Members upheld their obligations under the agreements such as MFN and national treatment of like products. The world trading system could only succeed if Members continued their endeavour to tackle unfair practices when those occurred. The United Kingdom therefore thanked the United States for enabling that discussion.

11.38. It was important that Members made progress on issues such as industrial subsidies, State-owned enterprises and forced technology transfer. They also needed to ensure that they reduced WTO non-compliant protectionist measures. Unfair practices not only violated the agreements but had real-life impacts on the life of their citizens. Innovation was stifled, communities were damaged and uncompetitive companies were bolstered so they all benefited from advancing market principles.

11.39. The representative of the Russian Federation recalled that, as had been indicated at the General Council in March, Russia had concerns on the likely scope of application of the US proposal and its potential implication on the right of a State to regulate economic activities within its sovereign territory. While the Russian Federation had taken note of the relevant explanations and clarifications contained in the joint statement of Brazil and the United States, further elaborations on the meaning of the term market-oriented conditions were evidently needed particularly taking into account the existing subsidy schemes that provided financial support for domestic producers including those introduced as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic in major developed countries as had been mentioned by Nigeria. The Russian Federation stood ready for constructive engagement with the United States and other interested Members to better clarify those issues.

11.40. The representative of Chinese Taipei took note of the statement by Brazil and the United States and recognised its relevance to the discussion. The multilateral trading system should be based on free, open and market-oriented principles to ensure a level playing field for all. Chinese Taipei recognised the need to reflect Members' developmental or broader economic objectives to underpin industrial growth and protect the vulnerable sectors through proper government interventions.

11.41. The critical issue was that Members' policies and practices needed to be in line with existing WTO rules and to uphold the spirit of market-oriented principles in the multilateral trading system. Members' measures should not lead to the consequence of unfair competition and market distortion which would cause harm to enterprises and SMEs in particular that were striving to make themselves competitive under market-based conditions. Chinese Taipei remained open and ready to engage with all Members on the subject in a constructive manner.

11.42. The representative of Paraguay said that the matter warranted a discussion not only on a political level but also on a technical one within the organization. Advancing new disciplines in that area would however be difficult without in parallel having ambitious disciplines to generate market-oriented conditions in agriculture. That was a fundamental issue for the multilateral trading system.

11.43. The representative of South Africa noted that the substance of the current statement had not changed from the statement presented by the United States in December. South Africa therefore recalled its statement made in the December meeting of the General Council in 2019. The question that South Africa had was whether there was a common understanding among the membership on what they meant by market-oriented conditions.

11.44. South Africa believed in the role of the market but was also aware of its limitations. Members had a number of policies that were implemented in the public interest, addressed market failure or achieved developmental objectives including in South Africa's case addressing historical exclusion of especially black people in the mainstream economy. South Africa had asked the proponents in the last discussion on the issue whether those policies would be seen as creating non-market-oriented conditions even though they achieved a constitutional mandate. That would assist to understand the scope.

11.45. The economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic called for urgent policy responses to keep the economy afloat and enable people to retain their jobs and incomes. Some developed country governments had implemented price management initiatives as part of their Coronavirus Food Assistance Programmes. In some cases, governments had to intervene as the private sector had inflated the prices of sanitizers and PPEs. South Africa asked whether those measures would be seen as a contravention on some elements of the proposal that "The prices of capital, labour, technology and other factors were market-determined;" and that "Decisions of enterprises on prices, costs, inputs, purchases and sales were freely determined and made in response to market signals."

11.46. In some cases, governments had had to step in and direct companies to produce much needed equipment such as ventilators. Some governments also had laws that gave them authority to control the allocation of supplies as well as to order manufacturers to boost production. South Africa asked whether that would be seen as contradicting the clause entailed in the proposal that "decisions of enterprises on investment are freely determined and made in response to market signals". In a market economy, adjustments typically increased unemployment. Industries that became less profitable due to higher costs could lay off workers – growing unemployment, lowering wages – and it could take a while before the lower labour costs made it worthwhile to raise production in other industries.

11.47. COVID-19 had clearly demonstrated that without government assistance to retrain laid off workers and encourage new investments, the adjustment would be more painful, lengthy and costly. In some cases, betting only on market forces to do the necessary was not only slow but also dangerous. The capacity to cope with the inevitable forthcoming slowdown would depend crucially on how governments managed resources to guide structural transitions.

11.48. The speech by the UN Secretary-General in the 18th Nelson Mandela lecture of 18 July 2020 remained relevant as he had said that "COVID-19 has exposed the fragility of the world, the injustice of rising inequality and the fallacies and falsehoods, including that free markets can deliver healthcare for all." South Africa also recalled the recent consensus resolution passed at the United Nations Human Right Council entitled "The central role of the State in responding to pandemics and other health emergencies, and the socioeconomic consequences thereof in advancing sustainable development and the realization of all human rights" which could be found in document A/HRC/44/L.23/Rev.1 dated 15 July 2020. The WTO did not require its Members to adhere to any particular economic or political system. The WTO Agreements did not define the role of the State in relation to the market or civil society.

11.49. Furthermore, the dispute settlement system of the WTO was a mechanism available to Members to enforce rights and obligations. Any Member that felt that another Member was failing to adhere to its obligations should refer matters to the dispute settlement system for adjudication. That of course required a functional two stage dispute settlement system. Otherwise the mechanism to enforce rights and obligations would become non-operational and would render the development of new rules futile.

11.50. Given the current pandemic and crises, South Africa wondered if that discussion was realistic when some were talking about strategic vulnerabilities and the need to diversify supply chains to promote domestic manufacturing. In a context where Members were faced with rising unemployment, poverty and inequality – which was at crises levels in many parts of the world, South Africa wondered whether Members should instead be discussing the rebalancing between global rules and national economic development imperatives so as to enable them to respond to the crisis, promote economic recovery and safeguard and create jobs.

11.51. The representative of Canada agreed with the principle that the multilateral trading system should be based on open, market-oriented policies. Canada also supported the need for progressive liberalization while recognising the need to support economic development and sustainability. Canada shared the concerns of the United States and Brazil on the impact of non-market-oriented policies in generating overcapacity in certain sectors and creating trade distortions.

11.52. For example, situations where government policies, intergovernmental agreements and practices played a significant role in directing or influencing business decisions were of concern to Canada including the subsidization practices of some Members that had caused persistent overcapacity. Canada also shared the desire for a multilateral trading system that ensured a level

playing field for Members, workers and business. Canada remained open to engaging all Members in that regard including on discussions that could eventually lead to new disciplines. Canada would be interested in hearing from the United States and Brazil what role they envisioned the WTO playing in practice to address non-market policies.

11.53. The representative of India said that the US-Brazil joint statement was being examined by the capital and would therefore offer detailed comments on the proposal in due course. India had strived to pursue pro-market, pro-competition and transparent policies. State interventions had sometimes however been warranted to address market failures given the significant need to pursue pro-poor, pro-welfare and pro-equity policies to bring millions of people out of poverty. While doing so, India had been mindful of the need to achieve a fair balance between the market and state interventions.

11.54. As stated by India's Prime Minister the previous day, India celebrated openness in people and in governance. Open minds made open markets. Open markets led to greater prosperity. India shared those principles with many of its partners including the proponents of the statement. During the last six years, the government had made many efforts to make Indian economy more open and reform oriented. Those reforms had ensured increased competitiveness, enhanced transparency, expanded digitization and more policy stability.

11.55. India had raised concerns on the proposal in March and thanked the US delegation for providing Members more clarity on the proposal in their statement. However, some aspects contained in the statement needed further clarity and India looked forward to discussing with the delegations of the United States and Brazil in the coming days.

11.56. As a founding Member of the WTO, India believed that the WTO's core objective was promoting sustainable development "in a manner consistent with the needs and respective levels of economic development" of its Members. The focus of the WTO, in that regard, was to facilitate trade for welfare and development for the benefit of all Members and India remained committed to supporting measures that were aimed towards that end.

11.57. The representative of Japan welcomed the joint statement by the United States and Brazil which confirmed the principles that Members had reaffirmed and also clearly delineated the elements of market-oriented conditions. Efficient and effective functioning of markets was an indispensable foundation of the WTO system. It had a theoretical background, involved a policy-oriented argument but was never too academic for policy practitioners.

11.58. To overcome the new COVID-19 crisis, it was all the more important to secure free and fair trade and level playing field. The time was ripe for Members to share common recognition with the market-oriented conditions that formed the basis for efforts to regain the trust of the WTO. Japan therefore supported the initiative of the United States and Brazil in bringing the issue to the table. Japan hoped that the concept of a market-oriented condition was to be broadly shared and supported amongst Members as a principle for operating the multilateral trading system.

11.59. The representative of Burkina Faso asked whether the market-oriented conditions for the multilateral trading system required a total suppression of any form of domestic support and distorting effect on the global trading system for cotton. If there had been a self-regulating market in the cotton and textile sector without the intervention of public authorities through domestic support, Burkina Faso wondered what would happen with trade in that industry.

11.60. The representative of the United States thanked the colleagues from Brazil for collaborating on the joint statement and the delegations for their statements that day and for their engagement. The United States and Brazil looked forward to further engagement on the statement on the weeks and months ahead as it was a very important issue.

11.61. The representative of Brazil thanked all the reactions and comments and looked forward to continuing the fruitful discussions with Members on market-oriented conditions.

11.62. The General Council took note of the statements.

12 WAIVERS UNDER ARTICLE IX OF THE WTO AGREEMENT

12.1 Review of Waivers Pursuant to Article IX:4 of the WTO Agreement

12.1.1 Least-Developed Country Members – Obligations under Article 70.8 and Article 70.9 of the TRIPS Agreement with respect to Pharmaceutical Products, granted on 30 November 2015 until 1 January 2033 (WT/L/971)

12.1.2 Kimberley Process Certification Scheme for Rough Diamonds, granted on 26 July 2018 through 31 December 2024 (WT/L/1039)

12.1.3 Canada – CARIBCAN, granted on 28 July 2015 until 31 December 2023 (WT/L/958, WT/L/1091)

12.1. The Chairman recalled that in accordance with Paragraph 4 of Article IX of the WTO Agreement, "any waiver granted for a period of more than one year shall be reviewed by the Ministerial Conference not later than one year after it is granted, and thereafter annually until the waiver terminates".

12.2. There were three waivers before the General Council for review and they were listed in the proposed Agenda. One of the waivers under review provided that an annual report should be submitted by the Member concerned regarding the operation or implementation of the waiver with a view to facilitating its annual review by the General Council. The report from Canada had been circulated in document WT/L/1091.

12.3. The representative of Chad, on behalf of the LDCs, recalled that Members had had a few days of intense work which showed the essential nature of the WTO for global trade and the importance of the topics discussed there. In particular, when a Director-General in office was participating in that capacity at his last General Council meeting, that gave the event a real standing. It was true that any departure was difficult and painful particularly when that came about with someone with whom the LDCs had had highly cordial and highly beneficial relations with. The LDC Group hoped that the successor of Director-General Azevêdo would be able to continue with that excellent dynamic.

12.4. With regard to the Waiver for the LDCs from obligations under Articles 70.8 and 70.9 of the TRIPS Agreement, the LDC Group thanked the General Council for having proceeded with the review of the waiver. According to the exceptional circumstances which had given rise to the decision of November 2015 and the objectives of LDCs in terms of access to health care at an affordable cost, the adoption of the waiver in 2015 on obligations under Articles 70.8 and 70.9 of the TRIPS Agreement had sought to establish an international legal framework which had been necessary in order to allow LDCs to gain access to medicines at affordable prices in order to facilitate access to healthcare for their populations.

12.5. The LDC Group welcomed the highly valuable commitment and engagement of Director-General Azevêdo and his determination to see the effective implementation of that waiver to allow the LDCs to access medicines at reasonable prices to help them uplift their quality of life. The waiver was therefore an important legal instrument for producers, suppliers, buyers and donors of pharmaceutical products in those countries as it allowed for the production and market of pharmaceutical products and medicines at affordable prices.

12.6. The exceptional circumstances which had given rise to the adoption of the waiver in November 2015 were still a very current reality in numerous LDCs. Their populations were still facing serious difficulties in the area of health. Communicable and non-communicable diseases such as HIV, Malaria and Tuberculosis, among others, were yet to be eradicated in many LDCs and that was without mentioning the Ebola and Cholera pandemics which continued to bring about significant loss of human life. To that sombre list, that day, they could add the COVID-19 pandemic.

12.7. According to statistics from Médecins Sans Frontières, 80% of deaths caused by non-communicable diseases occurred in low- and middle-income countries with LDCs constituting the majority of low income countries. The circumstances which had justified the adoption of the waiver on obligations concerning pharmaceutical products were thus still a very current reality. Therefore,

those important flexibilities remained necessary in order for the LDCs to achieve SDG 3 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

12.8. The representative of Canada noted that, concerning the Canada-CARIBCAN waiver and in particular recognising the special relationship between Canada and the Commonwealth Caribbean, in 1986, CARIBCAN had been established to help improve the trade and economic development prospects of the region. In light of the continuing relevance of the considerations underlying CARIBCAN, the initiatives' objectives, scope and coverage remained unchanged. Canada thanked those Members that had expressed support for the programme and the associated WTO waiver.

12.9. The representative of Jamaica noted that, on the Canada-CARIBCAN waiver, Jamaica associated with the statement to be made by CARICOM and thanked Canada for its statement. Jamaica was one of the 18 beneficiary countries and wished to place on record its appreciation for the Government of Canada for CARIBCAN. CARIBCAN had not only contributed to the vibrant and mutually beneficial relationship which had existed between the two countries for many years but had also served to enhance the trade and economic integration of their economies.

12.10. Canada was the third leading market for Jamaica in terms of exports. Jamaica had consistently maintained a trade surplus with Canada since the early 1980s and the surplus currently stood at USD 34 million. Outside of the extracted industry, the Canadian market served a key destination for alumina, alcoholic beverages and non-traditional exports including fresh produce, baked goods, yams and sauces and condiments targeting the growing Jamaican diaspora. Jamaica's main imports were manufactured goods – important among them being medicinal and food products, chemicals, machinery and transport equipment.

12.11. For 2019, Canada had accounted for about 9% of total goods exports. In that same year, imports from Canada had constituted 1.6% of Jamaica's total imports. CARIBCAN continued to make a significant contribution to Jamaica on multiple fronts including through stimulating the expansion of trade and investment between their countries. The diversification of exports, increased export earnings, the promotion of growth of economic enterprise and productive capacity and increased employment and value addition for exports which were all priorities for the government of Jamaica. A significant portion of the businesses benefitting from their bilateral trade on the CARIBCAN were MSMEs many of which were owned by women and adult youth.

12.12. The data suggested that the bilateral trading relationship was expected to further expand in the coming years. Jamaica had also benefitted from Canadian investment in various sectors including the financial sector. Jamaica looked forward to the continued operation of CARIBCAN particularly in terms of assisting the country to attain the target set out in key development frameworks such as the Economic Growth Strategy, the National Export Strategy and the National Development Plan Vision 2030 which were aligned to the UN SDGs.

12.13. Jamaica reaffirmed its sincere gratitude to Canada for maintaining the CARIBCAN mechanism which it viewed as a clear demonstration of Canada's firm commitment to a partnership for trade and development with its Caribbean neighbours. Jamaica also thanked Members for the support that had been given to the waiver enabling those arrangements over the years and looked forward to the continuation of the support for any renewal request.

12.14. The representative of Saint Lucia, on behalf of CARICOM, thanked Canada for its report on the Canadian Tariff Treatment for Commonwealth Caribbean Countries. CARIBCAN which had been in place since 1986 had been vital to the export performance and by extension the economic dynamism of the beneficiary CARICOM Member States. The tariff preferences under CARIBCAN supported employment, contributed to government revenues, generated foreign exchange earnings and buttressed broader economic development throughout the CARICOM region.

12.15. For example, rum which was the region's single largest export to Canada under CARIBCAN continued to be its vital industry for CARICOM countries. The industry had earned over USD 550 million annually in foreign exchange. The sector yielded fiscal revenues to their government in excess of USD 350 million annually and it contributed to direct employment to the tune of over 100,000 workers both directly and indirectly. Importantly, the sector had a high level of employment of females in the sector over the past fifteen years.

12.16. Improved trade performance predicated and supported by preferences provided under CARIBCAN had created a pathway for the expansion of not only the rum industry but for many other industries of interest to the CARICOM Member States. Those preferences also served as a good indication of how non-reciprocal preferences to small States could energise trade performance and yield development-enhancing value.

12.17. The CARICOM Group once again thanked Canada for its report and looked forward to continuing to work with the Government of Canada to expand the product coverage under the agreement and where required to improve the rules of origin to ensure that more industries could benefit under that arrangement.

12.18. The representative of the European Union supported a permanent waiver for the LDCs from obligations under Articles 70.8 and 70.9 of the TRIPS Agreement and an indefinite extension of their exemption of the TRIPS requirements to provide protection for pharmaceutical products for as long as they remained a least-developed country.

12.19. The General Council took note of the report contained in document WT/L/1091 and of the statements.

13 COMMITTEE ON BUDGET, FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION - REPORT ON THE MEETING OF MARCH 2020 (WT/BFA/185/REV.1)

13.1. The Chairman drew attention to the report of the Budget Committee in document WT/BFA/185/Rev.1 and invited Ambassador Teehankee (Philippines), Chairman of the Budget Committee, to introduce the report.

13.2. Ambassador Manuel Teehankee (Philippines), Chairman of the Committee on Budget, Finance and Administration, said that his remarks focused on the report of the meeting that had taken place on 9 March in WT/BFA/185/Rev.1. He would also give some highlights of the carry-over of discussions of other formal meetings that had taken place since then. The topics that had been discussed by the Committee so far had been first and foremost the 2020 Work Plan.

13.3. On the 2020 Work Plan, the Committee had discussed the draft work plan for the coming year noting that that was a helpful tool for setting out when the various topics could be discussed by the Committee and the timing thereof.

13.4. On the 2020 Salary Scale, the Committee had taken note of a presentation by the Secretariat regarding the WTO Salary Scale for 2020. The Director-General had a mandate to approve the salary scales for each year in accordance with the staff regulations and staff rules. No adjustment had been made to the salary scale for 2020. Thus, it remained the same as that for 2019.

13.5. On the Proposed Financial Regulation for the Continuation of Operations Pending the Approval of the Budget, a proposal to modify Financial Regulation 10 had been tabled to provide a transition rule for situations where approval of the budget was still pending at the end of the year. The approval of the Financial Regulation would give predictability and certainty to the operations of the WTO and its Secretariat and was patterned after other similar regulations in other international organizations. Members had expressed general support of the proposed regulations subject to certain refinements that he was currently conducting consultations on.

13.6. On the Status Update on the Implementation of External Audit Recommendations, an update had been given that the Secretariat had accepted all the recommendations issued through the most recent audit report, in June 2019. As of February 2020, 61 recommendations had been implemented, going back to 2015, and the implementation of the remaining 14 recommendations were in progress. An update would be provided in the Audit Report for the 2019 Annual Financial Statements.

13.7. On the Coherence in the Establishment and Administration of WTO Trust Funds, the Committee had discussed a paper that contextualised the various Trust Funds that were currently being managed by the Secretariat. A follow paper had been discussed on 19 May 2020 and had been submitted for discussion by the Committee on 3 June. Further discussions were continuing in the Committee and he would provide further updates.

13.8. On the Updates regarding the After-Service Health Insurance, updates had also been made and the overarching point had been that there was a mismatch between the total premium paid and reimbursements. Further updates would be given on the matter.

13.9. On the 2021 Budget presentations, he was pleased to inform the Members that the 2021 Budget Proposals for the ITC and the WTO budgets had been presented to the Committee on 23 June and 7 July. While still subject to certain pending questions and further discussions, Members, as a whole, had expressed their general support to the 2021 Budget Proposals of the ITC and the WTO. Further deliberations were taking place and would take place during the next formal meeting scheduled for 17 September 2020.

13.10. On Contributions from Members and Observers, the Secretariat had notified the Committee that contributions received from Members for 2019 had been slightly lower than those that had been received in 2018. That was 92% versus 90%. There had been 12 Members under administrative measures as at 31 December 2019.

13.11. He further said that the following 6 Members were in Category I: Plurinational State of Bolivia, Cuba, Ghana, Guinea, Tonga and Zambia, that the following 2 Observers were in Category I: Iran and the Syrian Arab Republic. The following 3 Members were in Category II: Democratic Republic of Congo, Senegal and Yemen. Comoros was the only Observer in Category II. The following 8 Members were in Category III: Antigua and Barbuda, Burundi, Central African Republic, Congo, Guinea-Bissau, Niger, Sierra Leone and Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. The following 3 Observers were in Category III: Libya, Sao Tomé and Príncipe and Somalia.

13.12. For Observers, the level of contributions for 2019 had been 48%, compared to 61% for 2018. Five Observers had been under administrative measures as at 31 December 2019. The measures in place to follow up on arrears in contribution included sending reminder letters several times during the year; and regular follow-up with Member focal points. On that issue, some delegations had called for rules pertaining to Members under Category III of Administrative Measures to be consistently applied during meetings of the General Council. The Committee on Budget, Finance and Administration made the following recommendation to the General Council: "The Committee invites the General Council to urge Members and Observers under Administrative Measures to liquidate their arrears."

13.13. The General Council took note of the CBFA Chairman's statement, approved the Budget Committee's specific recommendation in paragraph 7.19 of WT/BFA/185/Rev.1, and adopted the report.

14 WTO PENSION PLAN MANAGEMENT BOARD – ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN, MEMBERS AND ALTERNATES (WT/GC/W/801)

14.1. The Chairman recalled that, in relation to the item, Article 4(a) of the Regulations of the WTO Pension Plan provided for the election by the General Council of a Chair, four members and four alternates to the WTO Pension Plan Management Board.

14.2. The term of office of the current membership of the Management Board had been due for renewal that month. In that regard, the outgoing Chair of the Management Board had sent a communication to all Members on 25 May inviting any interested candidate in serving on the Management Board to indicate so by no later than 8 June. The communication had also already identified the current Management Board members and alternates who had been willing to continue serving on the Board for another term. The outgoing Chair of the Board had then consulted with those individuals who had expressed interest in serving on the Board during the week of 8 June and with Members on 26 June.

14.3. As a result of the process, a consensus slate of candidates for members and alternates in the Board, and a new Chair, had been identified. They were listed in document WT/GC/W/801 which had been circulated on 3 July, and in which he had indicated his intention to propose those candidates for election to the Board at that day's meeting, unless comments had been received by close-of-business on 8 July. As he had received no comments or questions, he suggested that the slate of candidates in document WT/GC/W/801 be elected to the Management Board.

14.4. The General Council so agreed⁸.

15 OTHER BUSINESS

15.1 Statement by the Chairman on Administrative Measures for Members in Arrears

15.1. The Chairman, speaking under "Other Business", noted that the revised Administrative Measures for Members in arrears in WT/BFA/132 required that, at the end of each meeting of the General Council, the Chair of the Committee on Budget, Finance and Administration should provide information with regard to which Members and Observers were under Administrative Measures.

15.2. Deputy Director-General Karl Brauner, on behalf of the Chairman of the Committee on Budget, Finance and Administration, reported that the Administrative Measures applicable to Members and Observers with arrears in contribution had been in place since 1 March 2013. In accordance with the Decision of the General Council, he should state all Members and Observers under all categories of administrative measures. As at 15 July 2020, there had been 17 Members and 6 Observers under Administrative Measures. The following 6 Members were currently in Category I: Plurinational State of Bolivia, Cuba, Ghana, Guinea, Tonga and Zambia. The following 3 Members were in Category II: Democratic Republic of Congo, Senegal and Yemen. The following 8 Members were in Category III: Antigua and Barbuda, Burundi, Central African Republic, Congo, Guinea-Bissau, Niger, Sierra Leone and Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. The following 2 Observers were in Category I: Iran and Syrian Arab Republic. Comoros was the only Observer in Category II. The following 3 Observers were in Category III: Libya, Sao Tomé and Príncipe and Somalia.

15.3. The Chairman said that he was also required at each Council meeting to request Members and Observers in Categories II and III of the Measures to inform the Secretariat as to when their payment of arrears could be expected.

15.4. The representative of the United States asked for a clarification. Members had received the documentation for the March meeting that had a completely different list. It did occur to him that the list that was read out was never seen by Members and so if there was a way to make sure that there was a document so that Members knew at any particular time who was in arrears before the meeting that would be more helpful because Members had one set of documentation that had a different set of Members in arrears but then it was read out and it was a little confusing. So, it was possible that Members or Observers paid in-between and if they had a documentation from the June meeting that indicated a certain list it was confusing when there was a different list read that day. He had just wanted to flag that so that they could perhaps think about more transparency and clarity for everybody involved in going forward.

15.5. The General Council took note of the statements.

⁸ The decision was subsequently circulated in WT/L/1092.

ANNEX 1**FAREWELL STATEMENT BY ROBERTO AZEVÊDO, DIRECTOR-GENERAL¹**

In preparing for today, I found myself looking back seven years to when I first addressed you as Director-General. And I can now tell you from experience, the last speech is much harder than the first.

The first is about goals, and a game plan to tackle the future.

The last one is about what has been achieved; how much is left to do; and saying farewell to people we really cherish. This final part is the toughest of all.

WHAT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED

Back in September 2013, I said that the WTO was at a crossroads. It's still at a crossroads – and will continue to be for some time yet. This is not surprising, because this Organization is too important to have it easy.

Each word, each comma that we negotiate here has a direct and measurable impact on public policies and business realities – and consequently, on people's lives.

Our agreements are subject to dispute settlement procedures that are automatic and consequential – and I'll come back to this point.

This means that negotiated outcomes here are always the product of truly complex, long and painful diplomacy.

It was clear then, when I made that first speech to you, that we needed to deliver agreements to bring this Organization closer to the changing realities of the 21st century.

And together, we did. The Trade Facilitation Agreement, in Bali, put the Organization back on the map as a venue for global trade rule-making. It gave us confidence that the multilateral track was viable, and that with enough political will and pragmatism, we could strike deals of great value for trade, growth and development.

After that, we tried to advance the remaining Doha Round issues. It was, quite frankly, a tall order. We confronted the gateway issues head-on, and tested a large number of potential approaches. But despite intense efforts, including daily meetings and consultations with permanent representatives, it became apparent that positions in many areas were further apart than ever, with gaps widening instead of closing.

Still, in Nairobi in 2015 we managed to harvest some important multilateral outcomes. Eliminating agricultural export subsidies and the trade distortions they create had been a longstanding goal for many Members. We expanded the Information Technology Agreement, reducing and eliminating tariffs on \$1.3 trillion of new-generation tech products.

Not long after Nairobi, and like all multilateral institutions, the WTO was engulfed by strong political headwinds. These headwinds, and the associated tensions around trade, owe much to dramatic advances in technology, and the changes they have provoked in labour markets and in societies as a whole. It is also true, I have to say, that domestic social and economic policies have not done all they could have to contain inequalities of income and opportunity, and to ensure that the benefits from trade are more widespread.

Despite these very challenging circumstances, standing still, for this organization, was not an option. We needed to find ways to move forward.

¹ Also circulated in JOB/GC/241.

It was clear that Doha issues could not simply be abandoned. We needed to find new, creative ways of pressing on in areas of fundamental importance to a sizeable portion of the membership. And indeed, we have been able to make progress in the ongoing negotiations on Fisheries Subsidies, as well as in discussions on agriculture and other important issues.

At the same time, it was an inescapable reality that there were other, very real issues that needed to be addressed within the WTO. To take one example, it was simply not acceptable for the WTO to be in the 21st century, decades into a profound digital revolution, with no truly consequential discussions on digital trade.

We therefore began to test other approaches available in the WTO toolbox. Groups of Members started to explore innovative ways of advancing issues of interest. You know them all: E-commerce; the Facilitation of Investments for Development; Micro, Small and Medium Sized Enterprises; the Domestic Regulation of Services; and Trade and the Economic Empowerment of Women.

This second track of work received an important boost at MC11 in Buenos Aires in 2017. Those initiatives have since become an important part of work here in Geneva, with a growing number of participants from both the developed and developing worlds, and a welcome spirit of transparency and inclusivity from the proponents.

Delivering on both the multilateral front and the joint initiatives will be vital for the future of the system. For the road ahead, MC12 will be a key landmark. It must deliver credible agreements and map the way for further reforms.

I had hoped to work with you to deliver precisely such outcomes this past June. But the postponement of the ministerial to next year, because of the pandemic, brought me to the conclusion that I needed to step down this summer.

Had I stayed on for the remaining year in my term, the DG succession process and the MC12 preparatory process would have overlapped. My decades of experience working with this Organization left me firmly convinced that this would have irremediably compromised prospects for success at the ministerial.

In light of the COVID-19 crisis, MC12 has become even more important: it will be a key decision point for you to shape the direction of the post-COVID global economy.

The date of the ministerial, which now seems likely to be held next June, was beyond my control. The timing of my succession, however, was within my power to change. My early departure allows you to decouple the two processes. This was best for the system, making my choice a no-brainer.

MY LIFE AND THE WTO

It's a no-brainer because the WTO is much more than just a job to me. My first posting in Geneva was in 1997. We lived almost five years in this building. Even after going back to Brasília in 2001, my kids used to tease me that I hadn't actually left Geneva. I was still spending a big portion of my time here, first as a litigator, then as a negotiator.

In 2008, I came back as Brazil's Ambassador to the WTO. Five years later you appointed me Director General.

Twenty-three years of my professional life have been intrinsically linked to this Organization. I have had many happy moments, but also – like most of us – my share of disappointments.

But even at the lowest points, not once in these 23 years did I ever doubt the role that this system plays in improving people's lives around the world. We will be worse off if the system's relevance and effectiveness are allowed to erode.

THE FUTURE OF THE SYSTEM

When I announced my decision to step down back in May, I said that MC12 would be a stepping-stone to the future of the WTO.

But what should the future of the WTO look like? That's the question. Of course, it will be shaped by you, the Members. But I want to take this moment to share with you my own views on the subject.

And let me start with a warning: don't assume that the WTO has a future irrespective of what you do here.

To assure the future of the WTO, it is fundamental that Members truly believe in the need to update the system. Some may still believe that the pressures afflicting the WTO are localised, and therefore temporary. I want to assure you that they are not.

The pressures on trade, and on the WTO, derive from fundamental structural changes in the global economy. Changes in technology, groundbreaking business models, and shifts in the balance of economic power – they all have fundamentally altered the way countries and companies interact, not to mention the ways we go about our daily lives.

The rules we negotiated back in the 1980's and signed into force in 1994 are still very relevant and much-needed. They are, in fact, the last bastion preserving some degree of order and predictability in global trade and economic relations. Lose this, and we lose fundamental pillars of peace and prosperity.

Yet lose them we may - if the WTO does not evolve.

In substantive terms, there is a wide range of issues that are before you right now. Each of them would offer a meaningful contribution to WTO reform.

But at least as important as the 'what' of reform, is the 'how'.

The WTO is now driven by 164 members. I don't have to tell you how different they are, and how differently they think. A one-size-fits-all recipe will not work.

We should remember that agreements at the WTO have always sought to accommodate the diversity of our members with flexibilities of different kinds.

Special and differential treatment (S&D) was one way.

Member-specific flexibilities was another: subsidy caps, quotas, higher tariffs on certain products, and individual services commitments that open some areas - but not others.

In short, our agreements always had a way of accepting different contributions from members.

Our Trade Facilitation Agreement offers a new framework altogether for accommodating diversity among Members. It allowed each country to specify the flexibilities and the time they needed to implement the Agreement. And it did so without compromising the high level of ambition that was the final destination.

An open-minded approach to flexibilities would open up a new era of fruitful work for the organization. And when exploring potential areas for such work, unanimous agreement cannot be a prerequisite for starting conversations at the WTO. It's as simple as that.

Not all members will necessarily be ready for a particular conversation or a particular step. That is okay, and absolutely natural. But if full consensus is required to even begin to discuss any issue, this Organization will not survive. I'm glad that this is not where we are today.

The joint statement initiatives potentially represent one path to a more nimble, flexible WTO. No member is compelled to participate, yet the doors are open to any member willing to join – or willing to leave.

Plurilateral agreements have been with us since day one. But the fact is that any new flexible non-multilateral arrangement – whether it is the JSIs or something similar – will inevitably raise important practical and systemic questions.

Multilateralising their results may not always be possible. But limiting their application to signatories leads us to many grey areas. There will be many systemic questions, and the answers will differ, I suppose, from case to case. I'm sure you will be able to find them.

But even before you get to that point, you will need to get past the most common question I hear in discussions about such arrangements. And that question is: "Won't this approach compromise multilateralism?"

That's a big question. But my answer would be: "This approach is the only way we can save trade multilateralism."

And in this brave new world of ours, predictable and updated rules are of enormous value. They will be pursued, believe me. If not in the WTO, then in other less representative forums. And if governments are unwilling or unable to define the rules of the game, then these rules will be set by private parties – even less representative, and even less likely to deliver gains for everyone. We would all be better served if these rules, if these parameters, are negotiated at the WTO's large table.

Then again, we know that agreements reached at the WTO have historically been valued for their enforceability through the dispute settlement mechanism. And here, too, we have a problem.

We all know where we are with the appeals stage of that mechanism. Finding a solution is not particularly hard, if you all truly want a solution. And in this regard, I'm not sure this is where things stand.

There are stop-gap solutions out there. Some of you are moving in that direction already. Nevertheless, the fact that we are not in a position to agree on the means of enforcing our agreements speaks volumes.

Whatever decision you take on this, I would argue that a dysfunctional dispute settlement mechanism introduces an unacceptable asymmetry in the system. This asymmetry is to the particular detriment of the smaller and more vulnerable parties to any dispute. I don't think we can simply sweep this under the rug, and it must remain a priority for WTO members to address.

CONCLUSIONS

I'm sure that much of what I've said today is not news to you. I have made many of these points on previous occasions. Nonetheless, I thought I should clearly spell out what I think the most critical challenges and the more promising avenues are. And to the extent I have been able to facilitate and encourage some of this new thinking during my tenure as Director-General, I have been happy to do so.

All these innovative approaches are just a start, I would say, but a very promising start. Members now have a foundation on which to build new rules and standards, without ever forgetting the multilateral track and the fundamental issues that must still be addressed more fully.

We've achieved a lot and we must be proud of that. But much remains to be done.

I wish the next Director-General every success in addressing these and other challenges. I will certainly be supportive of your efforts and will be a passionate advocate for the system wherever the future takes me.

As I said earlier, the WTO has been an integral part of my life. Over the past 23 years, I have made life-long friends among delegates, peers – including you yourself, Mr Chairman – and the secretariat.

Speaking of the secretariat, I want you to know that we have within these premises nearly 700 souls who dedicate their careers to serving you, members, with commitment, professionalism, and a degree of excellence that you will not find anywhere else. I knew that before, and my time as DG confirmed everything I said. I am privileged to have worked with them and you are fortunate to be supported by people of such calibre.

I would like to extend special thanks to my deputies – Alan, Fred, Karl, and Xiaozhun – for their wise counsel and active engagement with Members and the wider trade community. And I want to thank each and every member of the Secretariat, both those who worked closely with me, including past and present members of my office, and those that I unfortunately didn't get to see as much. Without you we would not be the organization we are.

On the subject of support, I must find a very special place for my family – which is growing by the minute. In both the good moments and the difficult ones, they have all been great enthusiasts for the WTO project.

Regardless of what has or has not been achieved over the years, this human connection with all of you is what I prize the most. These deep and fundamental connections never disappear. So I'm sure that this is not a farewell. This is, as we say in Brazil, just a "*tchau*".

Thank you all for your strength, your companionship, your solidarity, your support, and your friendship. Come visit!

Thank you all once again, and like I said before: *Tchau!*

ANNEX 2**STATEMENTS BY DELEGATIONS
FAREWELL TO THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL****1. Brazil**

Dear Roberto,

As you will be stepping down by the end of next month, this is your last General Council meeting. Let me just reiterate that it has been an honour for Brazil, and I believe for all of us, to have you as the Director-General for the past seven years. I myself and many of the colleagues at the Brazilian Mission to the WTO had the privilege to work with you over the last two decades from Dispute Settlement Coordinator to Director for Economic Affairs, Vice-Minister for Economic Affairs, Brazil's Permanent Representative to the WTO. You led the Brazilian team throughout the Doha Round. Your trade knowledge and negotiating skills are unparalleled. It has been a remarkable diplomatic career at the Brazilian Foreign Service and we are all very proud to call you our colleague.

As the first Brazilian to serve at the highest office in the premier multilateral trade institution, your leadership has been inspiring to all of us. The WTO DG has a tough job. It is required to play the long game of economic diplomacy in multiple chess boards, exploring the limits between what is desirable and what is possible – with players that are cautious of sovereignty and yet bound by the design to negotiate amongst them. It is, if I might say, the art of the deal. And you have mastered that art. You walked with Members, respected their positions, facilitated agreements, fostered cooperation, challenged the organization and moved us all to the next level. All of these allowed us Members to overcome the deadlocks we have faced since 2008.

Under your leadership, a great deal was accomplished. You helped deliver critical results which include the Bali Package in 2013 and the Nairobi Package in 2015. It is no doubt that your departure is a loss for us and the WTO even more so if we consider the challenging time we are facing. The next Director-General will have among its own challenges the need to match the highest standards you set for the post of Director-General.

On behalf of the President of Brazil, of the Foreign Minister and of all your colleagues and friends at the Brazilian Foreign Ministry, we wish you success in your next endeavours and all the best to you, to Lelé and to your family.

Muito obrigado, Roberto.

2. Guatemala (GRULAC)

I would like to express our thanks to Roberto for your excellent leadership as Head of the WTO in the past seven years. We appreciate your continued efforts and contributions in favour of strengthening the multilateral trading system. You leave an important legacy to this organization. Thank you for honouring the name of our region over the years. I am sure that all members of GRULAC agree that your departure from the WTO will be heartfelt and undoubtedly you will be missed. Our best wishes for success in your future projects, both professional and personal.

Muchas gracias, Roberto.

3. Guatemala

I obviously associate with the words of GRULAC under this item, but Guatemala also wishes to pay tribute to the seven years of stewardship in which the Director-General has shown his full commitment. When he started as Director-General in 2013, I was privileged to collaborate with him in order to Chair the Trade Facilitation negotiations. In Bali, I was also close to him and I had the fortunate experience of learning so much during those negotiations.

I would also like to point out his enormous contribution to the multilateral trading system, as well as the support that he gave to the various initiatives brought forward by Members of this organization

that are now part of our future work, such as e-commerce, investment facilitation, MSMEs and gender issues.

In saying goodbye to one of our colleagues, all I have left to say is to wish him the best of luck, all my blessing go with you.

Muchas gracias, Roberto.

4. Thailand

At the outset, I would like to associate ourselves with the ASEAN statement.

Dear Roberto,

Thailand would like to express our sincere appreciation to you for your tireless efforts during your seven-year tenure as the WTO Director-General and your dedication to the organization which resulted in significant milestones for the multilateral trading system. Personally, I had the privilege to working very closely with you during my tenure as the General Council Chair last year. I am thankful for your active collaboration, wisdom and valuable advices offered to me. My Chairmanship would have been more difficult without your support. I will continue to cherish these valuable and memorable experiences.

I would also like to take this opportunity to ensure you that Thailand will remain committed and will give our strong support to the WTO and utmost efforts to delivering meaningful outcomes at MC12 in order to make the most from your well intentioned decision to step down as Director-General for the benefit of the system. I wish you luck and the very best for your future endeavours.

5. Switzerland

Dear Roberto,

You have battled on all fronts of trade negotiations, both as a representative of Brazil and as Director-General of the WTO. You have risen through the ranks with a steadiness that is only possible through talent.

In a moment of distraction that took me away from WTO affairs, I was reminded of you by a book by Erik Orsenna entitled "Journey to the Lands of Cotton: A Brief Manual of Globalisation". The author dedicates a short chapter to you entitled "The Coordinator", alluding to your central role in the dispute in which you defended Brazil's cotton interests against the United States. In this chapter, Erik Orsenna recounts one of your greatest successes in a manner that is sometimes critical, often tinged with humour, but always elegant. These are terms that also describe you well. Here is an extract from the chapter:

"Diplomats often receive impressive titles to compensate for their absence of genuine power and the lack of progress in the negotiations that they conduct. Yet this coordinator [and he is talking about you, Roberto] is in a different league. He, for two years, led a team of eventually victorious lawyers... Mr Coordinator-General coordinated the uncoordinatable."

Dear Roberto,

We have had the opportunity to make our way together over many years. I have witnessed your talents, your skill and your determination at crucial moments. Thank you for your commitment. You saw the Trade Facilitation Agreement negotiations through to a successful conclusion. Other tangible progress, such as the conclusion of a new agreement on trade facilitation, has also been achieved under your able leadership. You are leaving us prematurely, but we understand and accept your decision.

I wish you all the best for the future, both in any subsequent role and in your private and family life, as well as every success in all of your endeavours.

6. Tanzania

I wish to congratulate Mr. Roberto Azevêdo for his excellent leadership during the past seven years as Director-General of the World Trade Organization. It was during his tenure that we witnessed the WTO negotiations being revitalised from long-standing deadlocks. Under his stewardship, we were able to achieve numerous key outcomes, including the Trade Facilitation Agreement during the Bali Ministerial Conference in 2013, and the Decision on Export Subsidies and the LDC Package during the Nairobi Ministerial Conference in 2015.

The United Republic of Tanzania is grateful for his invaluable contribution to the multilateral, rules-based trading system which will forever remain one of his legacies.

Finally, I would like to wish him the best of luck and success in his future endeavours.

7. Singapore

The Singapore delegation would like to express our appreciation to you, DG Azevêdo, for your many years of tireless service to the WTO. As you had highlighted in your heartfelt message earlier, you have had the unenviable task of steering the WTO during some of its most challenging junctures. In recent years, the WTO has faced heightened trade tensions, brinksmanship, growing protectionism and unilateralism and increasing scepticism about the role and relevance of the WTO. Since the end of 2019, the WTO indeed and the world had to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet through all these challenges, you have provided a calm and steady leadership.

We would like to commend you on your invaluable contributions to the system, in particular the multilateral outcomes achieved in Bali and in Nairobi, as well as the entry into force of the Trade Facilitation Agreement and the TRIPS Amendment which occurred during your watch. You have been a true champion of the Joint Statement Initiatives. As one of the three co-convenors of the JSI on E-Commerce, I have seen first-hand your dedication to ensuring that the JSIs make progress and your focus on making the WTO more relevant by responding appropriately to the digital revolution. We also appreciate your transparent and inclusive approach as exemplified in establishing the Informal TNC and HODs process so that no Member is left behind.

Singapore has always enjoyed a longstanding and excellent working relationship with you. I understand that you first visited Singapore as a Brazilian diplomat for the WTO's First Ministerial Conference in December 1996. We look forward to welcoming you to Singapore again and wish you all the very best in your future endeavours.

8. Barbados

It would be remiss of me if I did not, on behalf of Barbados, take the opportunity to add my voice to those who have already paid tribute to the Chair of the TNC and our Director-General, Roberto. Barbados wishes to place on record its heartfelt thanks to you for your stewardship at the helm of this organization over the past seven years. We do recognise that for any Director-General leading an institution of 164 Members covering their development interests is by no means an easy task. You however have done so by staying in tune with the views and interests of Members. We are particularly appreciative of your frankness and accessibility. Barbados experienced this first-hand when we served as the coordinator of the ACP Group in 2015, as well as each time that the Group had to meet with you or participate in high-level panels in our Ministerial and brainstorming processes.

We commend you on keeping us, the Members, honest. We hope that this legacy reverberates throughout the history of the organization. As you continue on your next step, I encourage you to take a bit of pause and respite in beautiful Barbados, on our lovely beaches, sipping on some fine Mount Gay Rum. I wish you all the very best in the future.

9. Australia

Australia wishes to pay thanks to you, Roberto, for your tireless work over the past seven years to bring together the 164 Members of the WTO to promote global trade for the benefit of all. You have long been an advocate for agricultural trade liberalization and your support led to the Nairobi Decision to abolish agricultural export subsidies – a decision that has benefited all farmers. You also

played the pivotal role in concluding the Trade Facilitation Agreement – an agreement which broke new ground in promoting the smooth flow of goods globally. You have done much to encourage negotiating momentum and innovative approaches, including and especially for the Joint Statement Initiatives – helping Members move towards global trade rules that reflect the modern trading landscape. We have also appreciated your support for the Women and Trade agenda and the Buenos Aires Declaration on Trade and Women's Economic Empowerment.

Over the years, you have navigated difficult waters expertly – most recently in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. You responded swiftly to put us on the right track towards forming a coordinated global response underlining the WTO's critical role in promoting global economic recovery, not least through ensuring transparency and monitoring. As you said when announcing your decision to step down, it is now in the hands of all WTO Members and your successor to start shaping the WTO's agenda for the new post-COVID-19 realities. We intend to honour your contribution and your advocacy by working to update the system to ensure its relevancy and to start by delivering results at, if not before, MC12.

Thank you for your service and commitment to the rules-based trading system. On behalf of the Australian Government, I convey our warmest wishes to you and Lelé and greatest success in the future.

10. China

Let me join others in expressing our appreciation to Roberto for his statements, as well as his contribution to the WTO and the multilateral trading system. Looking back at the past seven years, Members could vividly recognise his vision, creativity and pragmatism with the successful delivery of the Trade Facilitation Agreement, the Information Technology Agreement Expansion and the elimination of agricultural export subsidies, among many others, just to name a few flagship achievements.

His contribution as WTO Director-General is distinctively permanent through multilateral outcomes showing us that producing results such as the Bali and Nairobi packages is possible in this multilateral organization. Like you said, we need to maintain this habit of delivery. In the last three to four years of office, the WTO has encountered unprecedented, formidable challenges with dynamic changes of the global economy. Roberto did his best in outreaching in Geneva and in the capitals to the public and private sectors, to business and to the people, to call for the reform of the WTO.

Roberto, it is obviously never easy to bid farewell to a friend like you. Our friendship began more than a decade ago when we were both delegates in Geneva at that time. All good things come to an end. This is a sad matter, but a reality that we have to accept. I wish you all the best and I hope that our paths will cross again at some point in time in the future.

I would also like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the four DDGs, Yonov, Karl, Alan and Xiaozhun, and the Chef de Cabinet, Tim. We appreciate your hard work and great contribution to this organization.

11. Honduras

I would like to associate myself with the words read out on behalf of GRULAC this morning. I will be brief because it is very difficult to summarise 22 years of acquaintance with you, Roberto, as a diplomat, as a colleague, as a Director-General. But I speak now on behalf of Honduras to pay tribute to your outstanding stewardship.

As the first Latin American to lead this organization, your legacy is a matter of pride for us. You have promoted and defended the system unflinchingly. Your commitment has been true from the first day. Your successor will undoubtedly have a tremendous challenge in following in your footsteps.

I want to thank you for having had the opportunity to work alongside you as Ambassador and as Director-General. I hope that your future endeavours will be crowned with every success on a professional and on a personal level.

12. Egypt

Mr. Director-General,

We would like to thank you for your masterpiece thinking. I would like to express our deep appreciation for your leadership, commitment and achievements during your tenure. You led this organization at a very turbulent time when the international trade and global economy are facing many challenges.

We believe you have deployed all your efforts to mitigate the multiple effects of these challenges on the multilateral trading system and we do recognise your tireless efforts and significant work. You would always be remembered by the rich legacy you left in this organization.

We would also like to pay tribute to all the DDGs and the members of the Secretariat who have done a remarkable work during the last seven years. In the end, we certainly wish you, Mr. Director-General, and your lovely family, all the best in your future endeavours.

13. Costa Rica

Mr. Director-General, I would like to express our thanks and gratitude for all the contributions you made to the work of the WTO and to the multilateral trading system. In February 2017, at the General Council and at the beginning of your second mandate, you said a few words that are still ringing in this House because they were totally topical then and now. In particular, you mentioned the need to promote efforts and cooperation at the international level.

You also highlighted that in difficult times, the usefulness of multilateral rules that are mutually agreed is more than evident, just as the possibility to resolve, according to these rules, the economic problems that can arise between nations. You even added that the multilateral institutions were created as a direct response to the terrible events of history and represent the enormous efforts of the world to avoid repetition of past mistakes. These institutions offer the necessary tools to face the many problems that are at the forefront of discussions today.

We would like to recognise your efforts to maintain the WTO as a relevant protagonist in global governance. Let me highlight three examples. First, under your leadership, the Trade Facilitation Agreement was concluded and came into force just as the ITA Extension and the agreement on Export Subsidies which were reached in Nairobi.

Second, during this period, you launched the reform process of the WTO and the updating of its rules to take on board the realities of the current global economy. The efforts are starting to bear fruit in the framework of the joint initiatives. In other areas, the discussions continue so as to improve the work of the organization, such as on transparency and notifications.

Third, the WTO continues to be a fundamental tool in the fight against protectionism. You have maintained this element and allowed the WTO to continue to serve this purpose. This exercise has played an ever-growing role in the context of the current crisis. We would like in particular to thank you for your efforts to monitor and ensure a follow-up to the measures adopted in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

For all these reasons, please allow me to repeat once again the thanks of the Government of Costa Rica. We will always remember your commitment and loyalty to this organization. Finally, I would like to wish you all the very best in your future endeavours, in your family life, in your personal life and in your professional life in this new chapter that you are about to embark upon.

14. Ukraine

We would like to express our sincere gratitude and appreciation to the Director-General, H.E. Roberto Azevêdo, for his years of service to the WTO and personal contribution to addressing the top challenges of the WTO and the entire multilateral trading system. This is a really big era in the

international trading system – what we have been discussing in the previous years. This is really a mood-setting landscape for the future generation.

Your leadership and personal devotion have guided WTO Members to move along the hardening interests where you have helped the Membership reach achievements despite the obstacles. Everyone is grateful for your leadership and the coordination of the activities of all of us in the World Trade Organization and in general in the trade universe.

We would like to thank you and your team for the tremendous work you carried out at the helm of the organization. We might not be able to direct those wind of changes, but we must adjust ourselves to harness the energy and the potential of the moment where we arrive in some key milestones and some certainty in the harbour of meaningful outcomes.

So, Director-General, thank you very much for this journey. The WTO Membership will certainly miss you and my delegation wishes you all success in your future endeavours and your activities. You are always welcome in Ukraine and thank you for your work and help to us and to the World Trade Organization in general.

15. European Union

Dear Roberto,

It would be impossible to sum up in a few words the immense contribution that you have offered to this organization throughout your career as capital-based official, as Ambassador in Geneva and eventually as Director-General. I still remember the first time we met to discuss WTO matters. It was many years ago – enough to say it was last century – when we were both posted to our respective missions here in Geneva.

You took the helm of the WTO at a challenging time. Three months later, you managed to deliver the Trade Facilitation Agreement. The hugs and some tears of joy in the final session in Bali mark a landmark achievement and a model for the future which would not have been possible without you. It would not have been possible because of the mix of talents that you put at the disposal of WTO Members. The talents that you have are unique:

- First, trade expertise. As my Swiss colleague recalls, those who had the misadventure of litigating against Brazil know something about it.
- Second, utmost transparency. The twenty hour-long session with more than one hundred delegations in the room, painstakingly going through every line of the negotiating text are still vivid in many colleagues' memories – at least those who did not fall asleep at that time.
- Third, human touch. As you said so many times, you have been in our shoes. We have always considered you one of us – *primus inter pares* – who could understand our constraints and motivations.
- Fourth, respect and dedication to this organization – which is probably what eventually led you to take a decision which the European Union regrets but understands – a feeling that usually accompanies difficult choices.

Roberto has more hidden talents which, looking at your knee today, few may suspect. This talent involve your football skills. As any great player, you were respected by adversaries and loved by teammates. Your touch and vision allowed this organization to score memorable goals and victories. And I wish you the same on your future life and all the best wishes to your wife, Lelé, and to your entire family.

Thank you very much.

16. Ecuador

Mr. Director-General,

I would like to add Ecuador's voice to the expressions of thanks by Members for all your contributions in the work of the WTO, especially its achievements during your tenure. You have worked tirelessly. We would like to thank you for your personal talent as a negotiator and a leader. It has been an honour to have a Director-General who really embodies the energy and dynamism of the Latin Americans.

We would also like to extend to you the thanks of the former Permanent Representative of Ecuador who chaired the CTD. We will miss you, but we will of course have your brilliant legacy at the same time. This is a new stage in your life and we express our warmest wishes for plenty of success in your future endeavours and all the best to you and to your entire family.

17. Canada

Canada wishes to thank you, Roberto, for your hard work and dedication as the Director-General of the WTO for the past seven years. We would like to commend you on your vision to strengthen the rules-based multilateral trading system and your commitment to work with all Members in an inclusive and transparent manner.

Canada recognises that your two terms have been marked by uncertainty, unpredictability and volatility on the multilateral front and that your task was not an easy one. Nevertheless, your commitment to this institution and its Members and your tireless efforts have guided our work in navigating these troubled times. We are grateful for it.

We especially want to salute your leading role in working with the Members on the successful conclusion of the Trade Facilitation Agreement and subsequent overwhelming ratification of this Agreement by Members, as well as your support in aiming to unlock the negotiating function of the organization.

Canada also recognises your strong leadership in advancing trade and gender issues at the WTO through the Buenos Aires Declaration and appointment of the Gender Focal Point. As you know, gender issues are very important for Canada and we appreciated immensely having you as an ally to promote this objective in an organization that must adapt to 21st century realities.

Finally, I would like to convey my deep appreciation for your support of the Ottawa Group on WTO Reform. The perspectives you brought in the Group enriched our deliberations and contributed to the work of the Group in a very productive manner. I am sure I speak for all Ottawa Group Members in thanking you for your contribution.

On a personal note, I would like to stress that this is not a goodbye. It is just a "see you again soon". Of course, I look forward to having the privilege of crossing your path in the future.

18. United Kingdom

Dear Roberto,

I would like to convey the United Kingdom's warmest wishes to you. Thank you for everything you have done in this House to champion the multilateral rules-based system. You have served the Members and this organization through its most challenging days so far and the United Kingdom is extremely grateful to you and your team in view of your professionalism and service.

You have many notable successes which we have heard this morning, including, but not limited to, the Trade Facilitation in Bali and Export Competition in Nairobi. In addition, you have worked to bring in business and civil society more into our discussions here.

Most pertinently of all though, we have been reminded again this morning of your profound understanding of, and commitment to, the multilateral trading system. Perhaps, the best tribute we could give you, Roberto, would be to heed your wise words this morning and renew our efforts to

update the system as the best and indeed the only way to strengthen and preserve it for next twenty-five years.

I also want to thank you personally, Roberto, for the outstanding support you have given the United Kingdom as we have gone through our own transition here at the WTO as we have left the European Union. Roberto, I wish you and your family the very best of luck for the future and I am confident that we will be hearing great things from you as you embark on the next chapter of your extraordinary career. We will be proudly cheering you on from here in Geneva.

19. Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka joins other Members in placing on record its sincere appreciation and gratitude to you, Roberto, for your leadership, relentless efforts and unwavering commitment over the past seven years. It was exactly seven years ago, on 14 May 2013, that the General Council formally agreed to your appointment as the new Director-General. During this chapter, you, along with the Secretariat staff and the WTO Membership, worked hard with the renewed vision to ensure meaningful outcomes to take the multilateral trading agenda towards a new layer which are no doubt commendable.

My interaction with you and your loving wife, Maria, goes back to 1998 to 2002. At that time, I knew you only as Maria's husband. Sometimes you came to the CoA meetings to see your wife and at that time I was not aware Maria was even married. So one day I asked Maria, "Who is this handsome guy coming here and hugging you every time?" She said, "He is my husband." So, I was pleased to see Maria had got such a handsome husband.

Nevertheless, we worked towards many areas, but others very close to Maria than to Roberto. We are very saddened by your decision. But we know that this is not a decision that you and Maria have taken lightly, and you had the full understanding and support of all delegations enabling you to proceed with your role during this interim period.

Even in these most difficult times, you have always demonstrated great commitment and confidence, and this deserves our full admiration. With your retirement announcement, the Members did not have much time, but yet, as the leader of this very prestigious and unique rulemaking institution, you lent your leadership to the Secretariat for carrying out the substantive work during the past few months which we value immensely.

Finally, I wish you and your loving wife, Ambassador Maria, with much joy and happiness as you two begin a new chapter in your life. I hope we will get another opportunity to meet somewhere in the world. Until then, I say goodbye to you and to my very old friend, Ambassador Maria.

20. Jamaica (ACP Group)

On behalf of the ACP Group, I wish to extend our gratitude to Director-General Azevêdo for his sterling contribution to the multilateral trading system and the management of the WTO during his tenure.

Mr. Director-General, the ACP Group has had a long, fruitful and encouraging relationship with you dating back well before you assumed this post. The manifestation of your knowledge of trade and skills in trade negotiations during the Doha Round is legendary. You have been able to build a legacy even in challenging times. In fact, me speaking to you on Interprefy at this point is a mark of the man that you are.

Your pursuit of inclusivity and transparency in the organization has been admirable and your commitment to preserving development as a central pillar of the WTO has been essential to the interests of developing countries and LDCs. We commend you for your commitment for being accessible to Members, as demonstrated by your dedication in not only consulting during meetings and retreats of ACP Group Ambassadors over the years, but also in engaging large and small Members alike, giving your full respect and attention.

The ACP Group is proud to have had such a fruitful and cooperative relationship with you during your tenure. Our collaboration with you was instrumental in concluding the negotiations for the Trade Facilitation Agreement, the Nairobi Package and your initiative on Cotton. Through those we came to learn of your keen attention to detail. We were anticipating collaborating further with you for

outcomes on other files for MC12. What we hope – and know – is that you will be able to contribute as much as you can from wherever you are.

The ACP Group wishes to convey its thanks to you, DG Azevêdo, for your leadership and contribution to the development and growth of the WTO, even on these very trying circumstances. You have done well in continuing the tradition of excellence which we have come to expect from you and your office. For this, you will be missed. We wish you, Director-General, and your family all the very best in your future endeavours.

21. United States

Dear Roberto,

On behalf of the United States, I am pleased to express our gratitude to you for your able leadership of this organization over the past seven years. You have been a great listener, a problem-solver, a wonderful public spokesperson for the WTO, perhaps too good a litigator in a previous life, and true friend of the international trading system.

Under your leadership, the Membership has come together to achieve several important milestones and through these efforts you have provided your successor, whoever that may be, with some examples of how progress might be achieved here. The Bali and Nairobi Ministerial Conferences demonstrated that consensus on longstanding issues can be reached and multilateral outcomes are possible. Your steady hand and leadership here in Geneva and on the ground at the Conferences was essential to finding those balanced outcomes. Your reference in Buenos Aires also helped usher in the current focus on much needed reforms for the institution which is a deliverable in its own right.

While the Ministerial Conference gets the most attention, we also want to thank you for your personal engagement here in Geneva across a broad range of issues to build trust and facilitate resolutions, bring divergent perspectives together and provide momentum to new initiatives. Even before you took the helm as Director-General, my staff informs me that you were a rockstar of multilateral trade negotiations. That is their description, not mine. But I think it is fair to say that your departure from Geneva truly marks an end of an era. Looking forward, we want to wish you the very best in your next chapter.

I know it will be hard to leave the shores of beautiful lake Geneva but let's look on the bright side. Come September, you will never have to utter the phrase "inclusive, transparent and Member-driven" ever again. You won't have to lie awake at night wondering if the e-commerce and NVI moratoria linkage will survive just one more Ministerial. And a great relief to you, I am sure, you will never ever have to answer the "why" question. Thank you and best wishes to you, to Lelé and to your expanding family. *Tchau!*

22. North Macedonia

I would like to extend our sincere gratitude to the Director-General for his leadership of the WTO over the past seven years. He is strongly committed to ensuring that trade liberalization across the globe benefits the major pillar of global economic governance. DG Azevêdo's work has been fully supported by North Macedonia, a small landlocked country. Promoting the objectives of maintaining a predictable and transparent trading system, he has contributed in conducting successful Ministerial Conferences in Bali and in Nairobi where important outcomes and roadmaps were delivered.

We recognise that the principles of open trade and trade facilitation should be better integrated into domestic policies in international initiatives such as advancing e-commerce, enlarging Membership of the GPA, small business initiatives, among others. DG Azevêdo has been always supportive of these initiatives and we are thankful for his personal engagement.

Once again, we would like to thank you, Director-General, for the open cooperation and for your commitments to the multilateral trading system, as we value your devotion to serving the goals for advancement of the WTO work. I would like to join others in wishing you all the best in your future endeavours, both professionally and personally.

23. India

Mr. Director-General,

I recall your visit to New Delhi in March 2018 for the Informal Ministerial Meeting. Then I had the opportunity to meet you and interact with you in a different capacity when you met our Prime Minister during that visit. I was there during that meeting. I take this opportunity to place on record India's deep appreciation for your leadership of the WTO during the last seven years. India shall always cherish your contribution.

You led the WTO during one of its most challenging times. It was a challenging time not only for the organization, but also for global trade in general. It further got aggravated since the outbreak of the pandemic this year. We would have liked to see you and your stewardship supporting us through MC12 next year. Yet we respect your decision and also appreciate that you decided to step down a year ahead in the best interest of the organization. I deeply appreciate that.

We will miss your profound qualities of head and heart, your great expertise and sensitivity to the concerns of all Members together with openness with which you carried out your responsibilities of the office of the Director-General. On behalf of my country, India, I wish you all the best for your future endeavours and extend an invitation that, whenever you feel to visit India, you are most welcome.

24. Tajikistan

I would like to join others to bid farewell to the Director-General. It is with great sadness that I say goodbye to you, Director-General. We express our feelings and were unpleasantly surprised to hear your unexpected departure during the HoDs meeting on 14 May. However, we do understand and respect your decision to step down as of 1 September 2020.

The Republic of Tajikistan commends and highly appreciates your great leadership and contributions to the global trading system. It has been an honour working with a leader like you and thank you for the support you have extended to Members during these seven years. We will miss your contributions to the multilateral trading system. My delegation wishes you the best of luck and continued success wherever you may find yourself.

25. Viet Nam (ASEAN)

ASEAN Member States are grateful to the Director-General, Roberto Azevêdo, for his hard work, tireless efforts and contributions to promote the rules-based multilateral trading system for the benefit of all. DG Azevêdo has led the WTO effectively during the extraordinary, difficult time of COVID-19. His initiative to monitor and promote the transparency of COVID-19 trade measures adopted by Members is highly appreciated by all Members and the business community around the world.

The legacy of DG Azevêdo during his tenure over the last seven years and his contributions to the WTO system are of significant importance. This includes his advocacy of the WTO principles and values, effective management of the WTO Secretariat and ability to bridge different positions at a critical juncture of the WTO, together with his numerous initiatives to achieve concrete outcomes of the WTO. For example, he chaired the successful conclusion of the TFA in 2013. The high standard and expertise and dedication of the WTO Secretariat is also a testament of DG Azevêdo's leadership.

ASEAN is sad to bid farewell to DG Azevêdo. We are very grateful and wish him all the best in his future endeavours. Viet Nam had the opportunity to welcome the visit by DG Azevêdo in 2016 and would be honoured to welcoming you back at any time.

26. Dominican Republic

We would like to thank the Director-General for his outstanding leadership in the WTO and unshakable commitment for the WTO. He assumed office in 2013. He has expended his energy and wisdom in leading the organization in order to meet the challenges of the WTO and to uphold the multilateral trading system based on rules. He has achieved historical results for the organization.

Testimony of this is the historical Agreement on Trade Facilitation. This is a multilateral agreement of significance for the world.

In the face of the pandemic, the Director-General has become an advocate of a trading system based on predictability and transparency. We have been able to ensure trade amongst nations of essential goods and medical equipment, among others. This is an unprecedented world health crisis and DG Azevêdo promoted transparency in the notification of COVID-19 related trade measures adopted by Members. His steady hand was of great assistance for many of the decisions our capital had to make.

The Dominican Republic wishes to bid farewell to DG Azevêdo while wishing him the best in his private and professional life. We are certain to be able to count on his commitment always in order to achieve a more just, inclusive and transparent multilateral trading system.

27. Japan

Dear Roberto,

I would like to convey Japan's deep appreciation for your tremendous contribution to the multilateral trading system and the WTO. Under your leadership, the WTO has seen important progress. As you mentioned at the outset and as mentioned by colleagues, the WTO has expanded its scope into new dimensions including through the TFA, promoted sectoral trade liberalization exemplified by the ITA Expansion and realised significant agricultural reform by agreeing on the elimination of the agricultural export subsidies during your term.

Most recently, we have observed your remarkable leadership to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. In this unprecedented crisis, you acted swiftly and led the WTO Secretariat in conducting monitoring work and cooperating with other international organizations to maintain free and open trade and mitigate the damages to international trade. We very much appreciate the efforts by you and your team to establish the digital meeting platform and enable meetings to take place smoothly even during the crisis.

We applaud the transparency, openness and integrity you have shown during your tenure. We also appreciate the fact that you have served as a strong bridge between Japan and the WTO. You visited Japan a number of times, exchanged views with Prime Minister Abe and other Japanese leaders and closely discussed how to maintain and, if possible, enhance the multilateral trading system. For our leaders, their appointments with you have always been the highest priority because we know you are not only the WTO Director-General but our comrade in supporting a high cause and we are bound in warm friendship. We particularly value your personal contribution to the success of the G20 process chaired by Japan last year.

In closing, we would like to express once again Japan's very deep gratitude to you and sincerely wish you and your family all the best in your future endeavours.

28. Pakistan

Thank you, Director-General for your remarks in the morning. Pakistan takes the floor to bid you farewell, to acknowledge the hard work you have put in to steering this organization over the last several years and to thank you for your contribution to the multilateral trading system. Our appreciation goes out to you, Director-General, for championing the cause of trade and development globally in these challenging times. We are confident that you will contribute with the same zest wherever you go, and we wish you and your family all the best in your future endeavours.

29. Chad (LDCs)

Dear Roberto,

Over these past seven years which you have spent at the helm of the organization, you have chalked up a number of important achievements on behalf of multilateralism and development. I followed very closely and with great interest your swan song speech. You have mentioned at least ten times in that speech the word "flexibility". This word has a particular significance for the LDC Group, and you know very well why. Under your leadership the WTO, with the perseverance and the efforts of

all the Membership, reached a multilateral trade agreement on trade facilitation. This is an undeniable achievement for world trade.

Under your leadership, the decision on preferential rules of origin in favour of LDCs was achieved. Members also discussed with great interest the reduction of domestic support for cotton production in Nairobi in 2015. Here, I would like to draw special attention to our deep gratitude on behalf of the C-4. We want to pay a vibrant tribute to you for having managed to organise with us the first World Cotton Day, which was a tremendous success here in Geneva.

Since everything, or almost everything, has already been said and those who will follow will also mention the weighty legacy that Roberto would leave us, I would simply like to mention an example. When there were rumours in the press regarding the possible departure of the Director-General, those rumours became more frequent until when, one morning, as far I am concerned, I received a phone call from Roberto himself telling me what I already knew. I might sound selfish when I say that once he had given me this piece of news, I no longer thought of him, nor of his family, nor of the WTO, but I thought of our Group, the LDC Group.

For the LDC Group, and particularly for the mission coordinating the LDC Group, Roberto has been our true friend. We are well aware of the limits of a Director-General. In the WTO, he has to act as a referee and be impartial. But being at the helm of this organization, he also guided us in terms of strategy. And as any fair guide, you choose your destination and he leads you there. And he was able to warn us when there was a threat. In other words, he was able to gain the trust of the LDC Group and we felt safe with him.

Roberto was an unwavering champion of the multilateral trading system. We will always remember his work in favour of inclusiveness, including in the working procedures of the WTO, the formats of different meetings – things that seem like details, but that were vital for the participation of all Members in the work and life of the organization. Only time will tell the significance of everything that you personally brought to the life of the organization. The technical assistance and capacity building activities for LDCs as enshrined in the Marrakesh Agreement are being fulfilled to the satisfaction of Members. I want to thank you for this.

On behalf of the LDC Group, you will remain our true friend. As such, I am very proud of this friendship. I would personally want to wish you and your wife, who has undoubtedly contributed a great deal to your achievements here at the WTO, all the best. Thank you.

30. Botswana (African Group)

Saying farewell is never easy but it is an opportunity to look back and appreciate some of the important milestones and achievements that we have worked together and reached with you, Roberto, during your tenure at the WTO. Allow me to mention a few, by no means exhaustive, that stand out for us as African Group.

Having listened attentively to the warm words of appreciation and accolade, it goes without saying that you have left an indelible mark on the multilateral trading system. Through your able leadership, we achieved, as others have said before me, the Agreement on Trade Facilitation and delivered decisions that sought to provide better market access to goods and services from the LDCs, as well as reform in agriculture through the Decision on Export Competition. As others have also mentioned, we welcomed the operationalization of the TFA Facility which is meant to help Members implement their TFA commitments.

In addition, through your rallying call, we managed to get momentum that led to the entry into force of the TRIPS Agreement – 11 years since it was agreed in 2005. Furthermore, you have continuously advocated for the need to ensure through the WTO that the benefits of trade reach more people, especially in the most vulnerable countries. This has been demonstrable in your support for initiatives such as Aid for Trade, EIF, STDF and the TFA Facility that I mentioned early.

We must thank you, as the African Group, for having had a personal face to your leadership and being an approachable leader whenever we have convened a meeting on issues that were important to our development. As we bid you farewell, I would like to take this opportunity, on behalf of the African Group, my own country Botswana and certainly on my own behalf, to thank you for your

exemplary leadership of the WTO and dedication to the multilateral trading system. We wish you all the best in your endeavours, both professional and personal.

On the personal side, I must say that I was touched to hear you mention your five grand-daughters because in many African cultures, as well, I believe, in others, they are considered a special gift and blessing and I do hope that you find some time to spend more joyful moments with them. As you said yourself, *Tchau! À bientôt!*

31. Russian Federation

Dear Roberto,

I would like to express my delegation's sincere appreciation for your seven years of continuous dedicated service and your important contribution to this organization. Russia highly values your tireless efforts and unwavering commitment as Director-General to the WTO and to the multilateral trading system throughout your tenure, more so as this period represents one of the critical moments in the history of our organization.

We have witnessed how hard it was sometimes for you to get us out of deadlocks, and on behalf of my delegation that we were not always able to give you the necessary help. Your achievements, Roberto, are quite wide-ranging. The number of Members has increased. Each of the volumes of the World Trade Report focuses on different fundamental trade issues. Numerous studies have been published from specific issues. Efforts have been made to enhance the transparency of information on trade in goods and services. You have increased technical assistance through the use of new technologies. Under your leadership, the WTO has been tirelessly fighting against protectionism. On the negotiating front, we managed to successfully conclude and witness the entry into force of the TFA and the TRIPS Amendment, as well as several other important arrangements and decisions.

Roberto, you took off shortly after Russia has joined the WTO and you were of tremendous help to us even before and at the final stage of our accession process – being the Permanent Representative of Brazil. Please, believe that we keep this memory. When we have established our Separate Permanent Mission to the WTO, we were extremely pleased to have you with us at the opening ceremony of its premises in 2016.

Finally, Roberto, I wish you and your entire family a wonderful new life after 1 September. All the very best and continued success in your future endeavours. I hope these endeavours will not lead you far away from the WTO and that we will be able to rely on your support, advice and wisdom. I would also like to let you know that Russia is among those countries where you are always welcome whenever you decide to come.

32. Burkina Faso (C-4)

We associate with the statements made by the LDC Group, the G-33 and the African Group. We need to dwell on our happy memories and our achievements. Through your leadership, you have helped Members reach consensus on the Agreement on Trade Facilitation in Bali and the Decision on Export Competition in Nairobi. You have been a champion of the multilateral trading system. In furtherance of the Cotton Initiative, you were able to travel to Mali and Burkina Faso in 2016. Your contributions to the WTO and the multilateral trading system have cultivated a form of dynamism that is remarkable. On a personal level, you have built good relations with delegations including those of the C-4. The C-4 therefore wishes you and your entire family all the best on your future endeavours.

33. Côte d'Ivoire

We associate with the statements made by the African Group, the LDC Group and the C-4 paying tribute to the Director-General. Côte d'Ivoire would like to pay tribute to the outstanding work that you have achieved as the head of this organization. We congratulate you for your leadership which has enabled this organization to react appropriately in given circumstances. You have not fulfilled

your entire mandate, it is true, but you have fulfilled your mission perfectly. We have achieved results. And this is what we will remember.

Côte d'Ivoire is happy to see your family and your wife here today. When you campaigned for your election, you did not travel. Your wife travelled to our country. When we heard that you were leaving the WTO, we thought you were very fortunate. We would like to reiterate our thanks for having visited our country in February 2016. Thank you very much. God bless you.

34. Zimbabwe

We associate with the statements made by the African Group and the ACP. I would like to express my delegation's sincere and profound appreciation to you, Roberto, for your able stewardship of the WTO over the last seven years and your overall twenty-three years of service to the rules-based multilateral trading system. It sounds cliché to say that you have left a mark in this organization, but indeed you have.

I came to Geneva in November 2014, just a year after you assumed post in the WTO as Director-General. My tenure in Geneva and specifically as Ambassador to the WTO afforded me the privilege and honour to interact with you, both bilaterally and multilaterally, on a number of occasions, including during the Aid for Trade Global Review in 2017, when I served as the Chair of the Committee on Trade and Development. I must say that every such occasion was worthwhile because I always found you to be knowledgeable, courteous, calm and composed even in difficult circumstances, but also forthright. I benefitted a lot from your rich experience of dealing with trade issues which enabled you to put forward creative ideas when addressing challenges that confronted the Membership in the organization.

This Monday, during the TNC Meeting, you reminded us of the important transparency reforms that you instituted in the working methods of this organization. I am referring here to the migration from the Director-General's Green Room consultations to the more inclusive and transparent Heads of Delegation format which is one of your legacies at the WTO. After all, what we learn from those who have cared to study the subject of international trade is that equal participation of all countries in the setting of a just, equitable, democratic and inclusive trading system will in fact contribute to a better world for all.

In my own assessment, the conclusion and coming into effect of the historic Trade Facilitation Agreement will remain the jewel in the crown of your sterling stewardship of this organization. It is perhaps one of the most far reaching achievements of the WTO thus far. By promising to break down bureaucracy and expedite the movement of goods, the TFA has special significance for Zimbabwe, in countries like ours which are landlocked.

Finally, I wish to conclude by saying that it is a real honour to have worked with you, Roberto, as our Director-General, as we navigated through the many challenges that confronted us over the years. I wish you all the best in your future endeavours. *Muito obrigado, Roberto. Tchau!*

35. Republic of Korea

I would like to thank Director-General Azevêdo for his last report to the General Council which I believe will be cherished as a precious guidance to the Members of the WTO, as well as for the sincere advices to Ambassadors present here in this room. Your time here as Director-General has not only been delightful, but also productive. I will not enumerate all the achievements that the WTO has garnered during your tenure. However, I would like to send our deep appreciation to you for the relentless efforts in promoting the rules-based multilateral trading system.

In particular, in response to recent unprecedented challenges, you collaborated closely with many international organizations to highlight the importance of trade and the global supply chain. You also reached out to various stakeholders outside of the WTO, including the International Chamber of Commerce, giving voices to those that rely on the WTO.

You have served this organization and the Members well. But as you mentioned earlier this week at your last TNC Meeting, decisions made at the WTO will matter. And this brings me to ask you of one more service – to continue to champion the critical importance of the rules-based multilateral trading system. I wish you the best of luck and happiness in your path going forward.

36. Turkey

Dear Roberto,

Let me express that we are sad to see you leave. Turkey commends you for your commitment and dedication. It goes without saying that you contributed immensely to the work of the WTO during your seven years as Director-General. Turkey supported you in this venture. In tough times, especially in recent years, we saw you try to calm things down and push certain issues when and where necessary. More importantly, we saw you act out of conviction that remain true to the values and principles of the WTO.

It is a rare opportunity for any international organization to have someone like you at the helm. For that, I would like to extend appreciation to you on behalf of my country and my delegation. We wish you the best in your future endeavour, success, health and happiness.

37. Afghanistan

Dear Roberto,

Yesterday, thanks to the workers at the backyard of the house of the Ambassador of Cameroon, we had a very lovely moment of laughter during the meeting. But today, it is a very emotional one. I would like to share Afghanistan's sadness that you will depart from this organization one year before your term's expiration. We thank you for your farewell statement to Members today. I want to convey the Afghan Government's appreciation and gratefulness to you for your wise leadership of the WTO over the last seven years. We also acknowledge and applaud your genuine intention to avoid a situation where the next DG Selection Process in 2021 might distract the work on MC12.

You are leaving this organization at a critical moment marked by the COVID-19 pandemic, including its profound impact on Members' economies and trade and rising international trade tensions. Despite many challenges and hard times during your tenure, you have successfully managed to steer this organization in the right direction and avoiding the circumstances of getting exacerbated and out of control.

Without any doubt, you had remarkable achievements during your office – one of them is of course the negotiation and the conclusion of the historic 21st century multilateral trade agreement, the Trade Facilitation Agreement. We are confident that your successor will build upon those achievements. Another key achievement of your tenure is the further expansion of WTO Membership, especially to the countries which were suffering from armed conflict and fragility like mine. Afghanistan became a Member of the WTO in 2016 during your office. The Afghan people and government are extremely grateful for your support extended to our accession process. Hence, you will be always remembered in Afghanistan because of that.

On behalf of my Government and colleagues here in Geneva, I want to end my statement by wishing you all the very best in your professional and personal life. *Tchau!* Stay healthy and safe.

38. Nigeria

We wish to associate with the statements made by the African Group and the ACP Group. We thank the Director-General for his report to the General Council this morning.

On behalf of the Government of Nigeria, our delegation would like to express gratitude and deep appreciation to you, Director-General, for the support and friendship you extended to Nigeria throughout the period of your tenure as the Director-General of the WTO. We remain grateful to you. It is equally our wish to commend you as the Director-General for the achievements you recorded in this organization as enumerated by various Members.

The legacy that you will leave behind will be remarkable and indeed historic. I could recall, while in Bali during the Ninth WTO Ministerial Conference, as soon as the Agreement on Trade Facilitation was adopted by the entire Membership, the Director-General did not hide his excitement. In fact, the positive reaction by the Director-General in that hall made most of us in the hall to move into joining him in tears and clapping hands with everyone's exhibition of happiness.

As you are going to leave us, we wish you all the best in your future endeavour. However, the WTO and its Members must continue to consult you where necessary due to your rich experience. Thank you. Best of luck. Warm regards to your entire family.

39. Philippines

At the outset, the Philippines associates itself with the statement made by ASEAN.

The Philippines thanks the Director-General for his final report as Chair of the Trade Negotiations Committee and join other colleagues in paying tribute to him as the Sixth Director-General of the WTO, and shepherding the WTO through MC9, 10 and 11, in Bali, Nairobi and Buenos Aires.

I first encountered you in 2008 as the incoming Head of Delegation of Brazil and a fellow Ambassador during my first mandate as Ambassador. In 2013, seven years ago, one among us HODs was able to endeavour to ascend the position of Director-General. Indeed, you have been a trailblazer, as being the first Director-General from Brazil, the first Director-General from Latin America, and the first WTO Head of Delegation Ambassador to have made it to the top of the organization. You will always have a special place among us Ambassadors in becoming the leader for seven years of WTO and your commitment and dedication to the multilateral trading system. DG Azevêdo, you will always be remembered as a first among equals.

It would only be fitting to once again extend our deepest appreciation to you DG Roberto Azevêdo for all your accomplishments as our Director-General, and we hope to be able to continue to count on your guidance as we do our best to continue building on your indelible contributions and fulfil your deep commitment to and aspirations for the multilateral trading system. We also hope to welcome you and your family in the Philippines and continue our friendship and collaboration.

I wish you, Director-General, your wife Lelé and your family, all the best in the next phases of your professional and personal life.

40. Senegal

Dear Roberto,

The Government of Senegal would like to associate with those Members who have paid tribute to you. Throughout your mandate as Director-General, you have listened to Members. You have shown interest in everyone's concerns and you have always been committed in your ideas and convictions. We do not intend to say what you have done over the past years. The results in Bali and Nairobi speak for themselves regarding your contribution to the multilateral trading system. We wish you and your family all the best in your future endeavours.

41. Kenya

Kenya would like to associate with the statements made by the African Group and the ACP Group. We join others in paying tribute to DG Roberto Azevêdo for your unwavering leadership as Director-General and Chairman of the Trade Negotiations Committee for the past seven years. Kenya acknowledges and appreciates the tireless efforts and steadfast commitment of the Director-General throughout your tenure – a period that represents one of the difficult times in the history of the WTO.

Since assumption of office in 2013, the Director-General remained steadfast in your aspiration and stewardship of the organization. It is during your tenure that the WTO reached important milestones in the Ministerial Conferences in Bali in 2013 with the conclusion of the Trade Facilitation Agreement, as well as in Nairobi in 2015 with the commitments on the Information Technology Agreement and the elimination of export subsidies. Kenya is therefore happy that you ably discharged your role as Director-General of the WTO.

During your tenure, we witnessed the enhancement of programmes relating to technical assistance and capacity building, accession of new Members and Aid for Trade. It is noteworthy that in August 2017, Kenya and the WTO hosted the first regional dialogue on WTO Accessions for the Greater Horn of Africa. This forum brought together four WTO Observers in the region and provided a platform to

share their accession experiences and reflect on the ways in which the WTO Membership can foster regional integration. During this forum, the WTO organised a special live training on accessions for the Observers. Kenya is therefore grateful for you, Director-General, for your commitment in fostering technical assistance and capacity building.

It is also during your tenure that the WTO faced some of the most difficult challenges – the failure to build consensus on the appointment of Appellate Body members leading to the collapse of the appellate mechanism; the clamour for systemic reforms of the WTO; and the continued lack of progress in the Doha Development Agenda. While Kenya is profoundly concerned with the lack of progress in resolving the prevailing challenges, we are aware this is attributable to the inability by Members to reach consensus despite the Director-General's invaluable diplomatic wit, strong sense of creativity, and gift of persuasion.

Kenya therefore wishes to sincerely thank you, Director-General, for your dedicated service to the WTO and its Members, and wish you the best in your future personal and professional endeavours. Thank you, Director-General.

42. Nepal

At the outset, I wish to extend my deep gratitude to the Director-General for efficiently leading this organization over the past seven years with some visible outcomes. Notably, the Director-General took an important initiative to bring the discussions of trade negotiations from a small group to a wider and more inclusive discussions where all Members and Observers could openly exchange their views.

I also recall the successful Ministerial Conference held in Bali, where DG Azevêdo played a key role in concluding the Agreement on Trade Facilitation among other outcomes. The TFA in fact became the first multilateral agreement of the WTO after its establishment in 1995.

The Director-General also played an important role in bringing the Nairobi Ministerial Conference to a successful conclusion where it was agreed to abolish export subsidies and grant preferential rules of origin for the LDCs, among others.

Most importantly, LDCs will remember you for your contribution in facilitating to incorporate the LDCs' agenda in the decision of the Ministerial Conferences both in Bali and in Nairobi – and also for your consistent support to the Enhanced Integrated Framework for LDCs, as well as to technical assistance and capacity building for the LDC delegates, including from the officials of Nepal.

I firmly recall your visit to Nepal in 2014. During your visit, you have shared in an interactive discussion your perspectives with high-level government officials, business leaders and stakeholders focusing on how LDCs and weak economies are being supported through the multilateral trading system and what will be their future prospect.

Even though the WTO is a Member-driven organization, you played an important role, not only in facilitating the process of Members' work, but also in providing exemplary leadership as the Chairperson of the Trade Negotiations Committee – a key component in the august work of the organization.

The Director-General's proactive role has been witnessed by the ongoing situation of the COVID-19 pandemic, where DG Azevêdo rigorously undertook possible initiatives under the circumstances, not only within the WTO framework, but also through collaboration with various intergovernmental organizations, including the WHO and the World Bank and through outreach to G20 Leaders and other key players in global trade as well.

To conclude, my delegation wishes to extend its sincere appreciation to the Director-General once again for his leadership and contribution in the WTO. I wish him and his family a successful and happy days ahead.

43. Norway

Dear Roberto,

Thank you for your remarks this morning – food for thought but no big surprises – a fact that reflects the consistency in how you have fulfilled your role and in the message you have been sending out to us the Members and to the world at large. In recalling your visit to Oslo in August 2013, shortly before you took office, you addressed the Annual Meeting of Norwegian Ambassadors with the message not fundamentally different from that of today. We have never doubted about your true commitment to the multilateral, rules-based trading system.

I am therefore honoured to convey on behalf of Norway our gratitude for your services to a global common good – a public good that is so fundamental for social and economic development and stability across the world. You have invested your energy, your physical and intellectual capacity and your precious time. You have spent seven of your best years being a global civil servant – a servant of global civilization. For this, we thank you.

In your statement, you reminded us also about the human dimension. Permit me therefore to end by quoting a favourite poet, the Nobel laureate Bob Dylan: "May your hands always be busy. May your feet always be swift. May you have a strong foundation when the winds of changes shift. May your heart always be joyful. May your song always be sung. And may you stay forever young." *Tchau!*

44. Cambodia

On behalf of my Government and on behalf of His Excellency Pan Sorasak, Minister of Commerce, I would like to commend and congratulate the Director-General for his able leadership and tireless efforts contributing to the success of the WTO and its achievements in the last seven years. We fully recognise what you just said about the Director-General's efforts in Bali. We believe that the Bali Package would not have been achieved without his contribution. We note his initiative and creativity which led to the adoption of many issues in the WTO, including the LDC issues such as in Bali for the DFQF market access for LDCs, in Nairobi for Rules of Origin and Services Waiver, as well as in Buenos Aires for the LDC Ministerial Declaration.

We testify to his support for the LDCs, especially during the period when Cambodia was the LDC Coordinator in 2017. We also note that the Director-General has greatly contributed to other successful negotiations and has strongly supported the multilateral trading system by upholding WTO rules and principles, increasing the ability and efficiency of the WTO Secretariat, and bridging different positions for many important issues including trade facilitation. Once again, I would like to take the opportunity to thank the Director-General for leading the WTO Secretariat to provide warm hospitality to our Prime Minister for his official visit in 2018 and during his attendance of the Global Review of Aid for Trade in 2019. The two visits saw the important role of the WTO to our government.

Mr. Director-General, it is hard to say farewell and goodbye to you. I really appreciate what you just mentioned that you would continue to support this organization in the future. We will remember you especially for your leadership which is always open and friendly. We wish the next Director-General to use this leadership style. We wish you and your family all the very best in your future endeavours. Thank you very much.

45. Mozambique

We associate with the statements made by the African Group, the LDC Group and the ACP Group.

Mozambique is honoured to be a part of the WTO family and is grateful to have this opportunity to add our voice in expressing our gratitude to Director-General Roberto Azevêdo right in the moment he departs from the leadership of this organization. I do not think that a goodbye may translate his departure, as certainly your wisdom has shown for long years your deep commitment to the multilateral trading system. Being so, I believe that by this and other reasons, the WTO and the multilateral trading system will continue to benefit from your contribution thanks to your recognisable expertise towards a better future for all.

In going through, one by one, in what refers to be the achievements this organization was able to reach under your able leadership, from you we learned that trade is a tool for development and also that trade should be beneficial to all, mainly to those who need it the most. For your leadership, commitment, guidance, wisdom and above all your friendship, on behalf of the Government of Mozambique and my own behalf, please accept our gratitude that is extended to your wife, Ambassador Lelé, and your entire family. We wish you all the best in your future endeavours. *Tchau! Muito Obrigado.*

46. Haiti

Mr. Director-General,

I would like to commend you for your leadership and for the numerous initiatives and your relentless efforts over the seven years you have spent at the helm of the WTO. Your commitment to a multilateral trading system which is rules-based is now known to all. For all your contributions, we would like to thank you from the deepest of our hearts. Your departure is going to leave a vacuum which will be difficult to fill, but such is life. Please allow me to wish you all the best for the future and to welcome the presence of your dear wife, Ambassador Maria.

47. Israel

Dear Roberto,

It is a great honour for me, on behalf of my government, to pay tribute and to bid you farewell as you will be departing from the WTO and Geneva soon. You have been a very prominent figure in the life of the WTO and the multilateral trading system throughout the last 25 years, first as a delegate and negotiator and then Ambassador of Brazil, and in the last seven years as the Director-General of this organization.

Throughout the years, you have demonstrated wisdom, knowledge, leadership and high level of loyalty and commitment to the multilateral trading system. In order to save time, I will not repeat words that have already been expressed by other colleagues. But I wish to associate my delegation with all the kind words of appreciation and gratitude that have been expressed by others.

On a more personal note, we first met about twenty years ago when you were a delegate of Brazil and I was a young delegate of my country here in Geneva. Already then you stood out as an active, sharp and highly skilled diplomat and negotiator. As you are now moving to a new stage in your life, I would like to wish you a lot of success and satisfaction in your professional and personal endeavours. Please keep in mind that Israel will always be happy to be a destination in one of your next journeys. I wish you all the best. Thank you for all your years of service.

48. Chinese Taipei

We acknowledge the long-time contribution DG Azevêdo has made to the WTO. We deeply regret your early departure, but we thank you for your consideration to promote a successful MC12. We wish you all the best in your future endeavours.

49. Angola

Angola associates itself with the statements made by the African Group and the ACP Group.

Mr. Director-General, on behalf of the Government of Angola, I would like to congratulate you on the long and difficult years you have been leading the work of our organization. We propose that you leave with your head held high and with a spirit of duty fulfilled, because if there has been any failure, it belongs to all of us WTO Members. Thank you very much.

50. Bangladesh

Mr. Director-General, my delegation also joins others commending you as the outgoing Director-General for your great leadership for the last seven years. Your tenure will fondly be remembered

among many other achievements such as the Bali and Nairobi Packages and for the successful conclusion of the Agreement on Trade Facilitation.

The recent outbreak of COVID-19 has aggravated the situation particularly for developing countries including LDCs whose economies and livelihood are at serious stake. On the other hand, as an organization, the WTO is currently at a crossroads and at a serious impasse amid an environment with a strong sense of unilateralism and protectionism. Even during times of extreme uncertainties, you have never given up.

You have been active inside and outside of the WTO by connecting State and non-State actors and other international organizations to find out solutions to our exceptional challenges. Although not all efforts have been successful, yet we deeply appreciate your good spirit, your positive outlook, brevity of speech, belief in multilateralism, readiness to engage and faith in humanity. These make you a unique person that we all, including all colleagues and the Secretariat, admire and respect.

In conclusion, my delegation wishes you good health, peace and prosperity for you and your family. All the best for your dreams and future endeavours.

51. Vanuatu (Pacific Group)

Dear Roberto, I wish to make this statement on behalf of the Pacific Group – a group that consists of islands within the huge and peaceful Pacific Ocean. The Pacific Group thanks you for your final progress report and for sharing your perspective on the work of the WTO. Our group joins Members in expressing our appreciation for the tremendous contributions you have made to the WTO during your tenure.

Although the more recent years have been the most challenging for the organization, you will be remembered for the achievements that have made the WTO become more relevant. The Agreement on Trade Facilitation adopted in Bali in 2013 and the Export Competition outcomes adopted in Nairobi are examples of these achievements and which some of my colleagues have already mentioned.

For our region in particular, your open, accessible and inclusive style of leadership provide small Members like us with the confidence to take our place in the table and to make our voices heard in this House. Your keen interest to better understand the Pacific Islands led to your visit to Fiji in 2018 in which you signed a memorandum of understanding to extend the cooperation between the WTO and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat to support our group on WTO issues, including implementation of the various WTO Agreements.

As you leave the WTO on 31 August, we wish you and your family well in your future endeavours.

52. Uruguay

Uruguay associates with the statement made by GRULAC.

Mr. Director-General, allow me to thank you on behalf of the Government of Uruguay and on my own behalf for the efforts, dedication and assiduous commitment to the multilateral trading system which you have deployed tirelessly over the past seven years.

On the serene shores of Lake Geneva, storms have arisen these past years. You have kept a steady hand on the till for the benefit of the multilateral trading system and for the benefit of each one of the Members. I wish to thank you also for the decisive push that you have given to the joint initiatives and personally for the backing you gave me as the Chair for the Council for Trade in Goods.

For a Uruguayan, it is always sad to say goodbye to a brother, especially when he was able to represent so well his country and mine. He honoured my capital with his presence when we celebrated the 25 years of the GATT Trade Negotiations. I would like to say that Uruguay and Montevideo feel that you belong to us. We hope that the winds will always blow in favour of you and your family.

53. South Africa

We align ourselves to the Africa Group and ACP Group statements.

We thank you, Director-General, for your work over the last 7 years. As we said when you announced your early departure, while this has been unexpected, we respect your decision.

Your contribution in facilitating an outcome on the TFA and entry into force of the TRIPS Amendment is noteworthy. In relation to agriculture, under your leadership, MC10 managed to deliver on export subsidies, which was an important contribution on agriculture reform. We would like to also congratulate you for having reconvened the TNC in formal mode. The TNC was created under paragraph 46 of the Doha Ministerial Declaration and has the mandate of supervising the overall conduct of the negotiations on mandated issues. The reconvening of the TNC in formal mode sets a positive precedent that the new Director-General will do well in following.

We also appreciate that under your watch, meetings of Heads of Delegation have been regularized. Your commitment to inclusion and transparency in decision-making processes in the WTO is worth mentioning. In our transparency paper "*An Inclusive Approach to Transparency and Notification Requirements in the WTO*" we stress that transparency should permeate all WTO activities.

It is a pity that the environment was not conducive to deliver on the DDA because, as you said, the WTO is at a crossroads. The Doha Round issues remain critical, especially in the context of COVID-19 in promoting an inclusive and development-oriented multilateral trading system that benefits all.

Article VI.4 of the Marrakesh Agreement states that the "The responsibilities of the Director-General and of the staff of the Secretariat shall be exclusively international in character." We thank you for your leadership in this regard as this is critical in ensuring the Secretariat serves all Members.

Your energy and commitment to advance multilateralism has been admirable, including your passion about the system and the need to safeguard it. We thank you for challenging us consistently, including today, to reflect on critical questions and issues. We thank you for the time you served as our Director-General and for your immense contribution. We salute you. The touching messages from colleagues are representative of the role you have played and the person you are.

There is a saying that "There is time for everything under the sun, a time to plant and a time to harvest!" You have planted the seeds. It is now for us as the Membership to ensure that these come to fruition for the benefit of all. This is now your time to harvest the fruits of your toil and hard labour and to spend valuable time with your wife, kids and grandchildren. The outpour of messages witnessed today is an apt tribute to a life of service that is so apparent in your case. All the best to you and your family. *Hamba Gashle!* It means goodbye in Isixhosa. *Tchau, muito obrigado!*

54. Indonesia

On behalf of the Government of Indonesia, I would like to convey our deepest appreciation and gratitude for DG Azevêdo's tireless efforts and remarkable work and endeavours for the last seven years. Our memory goes back to 2013 where we worked together towards a successful MC9 in Bali. Despite of the fact that you had just entered your office as a Director-General three months earlier, you have proven that Members have never been wrong for appointing you as Director-General.

Moreover, having you and the MC9 Chair, Minister Gita Wirjawan, to tirelessly bridge divergent views among Members at MC9 in order to put forward a proposal and present your compromise and to acclaim that the deal was done, have clearly indicated your commitment and belief in the multilateral trading system. I am more than proud and pleased to be the living witness of your hard work and dedication.

We are quite sure that these seven years should not have been easy for a WTO Director-General. The economic crisis brought about by a largescale pandemic laid in front of your work and at the same time required the multilateral trading system to keep its relevance and importance. Nevertheless, we are more than pleased to witness your endless encouragement to the Members that we can work on the matter together. We also hope that the foundation that you have placed in this organization will be a catalyst for us to solve the issues in front of us.

We thank you for your leadership, guidance, as well as friendship. We wish you nothing but the best and every success for your future endeavours. Indonesia will never close its doors for you and will always be pleased to have you in the future.

55. Ghana

Ghana associates itself with the statements made by the African Group and the ACP.

Mr. Director-General, your imminent departure provides us with an opportunity to reflect on the WTO as an institution and the contribution that it continues to make towards multilateralism. Over the last few years, as you are aware, some have questioned the WTO's relevance. But allow me to underline that without the WTO, the world would have witnessed a free for all fight in an international trade arena with the most vulnerable Members amongst us suffering the most.

You have made a policy contribution to the sustenance of the multilateral trading system. And we wish to join other Members in congratulating in this regard. Through your able leadership, the WTO concluded its first and major multilaterally agreed agreement – the TFA. This agreement still holds a lot of promise for all Members of the WTO. In 2015, we added to this achievement by adopting decisions on export competition and other areas of importance to LDCs. Another significant achievement is the coming into force of the TRIPS Amendment agreed as far back as 2005.

In the midst of all the difficulties that Members encountered, you remained focused and sought to bridge gaps among Members until this very day. As we bid farewell to you, we remain confident in the fact that you would remain a worthy Ambassador of the multilateral trading system generally and the WTO as an institution in particular. We wish you the very best in your future endeavours. Thank you very much.

56. Iceland

Dear Roberto,

I thank you for the good cooperation and for your friendship. It has been a pleasure working with you in these challenging times for world trade. Thank you for your valuable contribution to the organization. Your leadership on women's empowerment has been important for the organization and is appreciated. I thank you for your commitment and I thank you for your valuable advice. You will be remembered for your good legacy and you will be missed. I wish you and your family all the best for your future endeavours.

57. Fiji

We would like to bid farewell to our Director-General, H.E. Mr. Roberto Azevêdo. We associate the sentiments expressed by the ACP Group and the Pacific Group.

Fiji has been grateful to have a Director-General at this important institution with DG Azevêdo's calibre. DG Azevêdo, your outstanding leadership, understanding, patience and competency will surely be missed by smaller delegations like ours in Geneva. Given our vulnerability as a small island developing State, you have been at the helm in helping us find opportunities and supporting our economies' inclusivity. This despite the challenges we face in view of our geographical isolation and limitations.

It is our hope that you will continue to use your existing connection and network to advocate for multilateralism as a tool for global economic liberation, equality and sustainability, particularly for small island economies to enhance their ability to contribute effectively in the global value chain process. It does not matter if you are with us or not because your work and your legacy will always highlight each and every person in this institution, as they have been highlighted already.

On behalf of the Government of Fiji, we wish to say that you have tons of memories with us and you will surely be missed by each and every one of us. We wish you and your lovely family well in your next endeavour with continued good health and many more successes.

58. Albania

Like many, we were surprised and saddened by the Director-General's decision to depart the WTO one year before his term expires. The weeks since the announcement have not lessened sadness. But the need to reflect on the workings of this organization including its leadership has been forcefully brought home.

Let me express my sincere thanks and my country's gratitude for your leadership of the WTO over the last seven years. Leading the organization during such trying times is a difficult balancing act – one which you have accomplished with skill and empathy. Your dedication to a rules-based multilateral trading system that is transparent, open and inclusive has earned you our respect.

Thank you again for your exemplary service. I wish you and your family only the best in your future endeavours.

59. Namibia

We associate with the statements made by the African Group and the ACP Group. Allow me to join others in bidding farewell to the distinguished Director-General, Mr. Roberto Azevêdo, who I believe will be dearly missed by all of us, particularly during our march towards MC12.

Mr. Director-General, since your assumption of duty in September 2013 as Director-General for the WTO, your excellent contribution to this organization has been a remarkable one. Although leaving the WTO during these difficult times, your tenure of office has been marked with significant outcomes such as the conclusion of the 2013 Bali Ministerial Conference on the landmark Agreement on Trade Facilitation which entered into force on 22 February 2017, and to address obstacles that affect cross-border trade and eliminate export subsidies in Nairobi in 2015 to mention but just two.

Namibia places significant role in facilitating transit cargo through Port of Walvis Bay, a gateway into SADC, linking the corridors of Angola, the DRC, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Malawi and South Africa. In addition, Namibia is in a process of rolling out the first phase of the Namibia National Single Window Environment to further complement the objectives of the TFA as agreed in Bali.

These are all successes achieved during your able leadership to our prestigious organization. While thanking you for the contributions you have made to the WTO and the successes achieved under your able leadership, we thank you for having availed yourself for future consultations to the organization. This is a demonstration of his unwavering support to the multilateral trading system to which he has dedicated 23 years of his life. I wish you all the best in your future endeavours.

60. Malaysia

We associate ourselves with the statement of ASEAN.

On behalf of the Government of Malaysia, we wish to join in the chorus of statements expressing our gratitude to you, Director-General Roberto Azevêdo. Indeed, you have left a hallmark of achievements despite the challenging times for the multilateral trading system.

We recognise in particular the efforts that you have made in bridging the convergence and guiding us through the last three Ministerial Conferences, namely MC9 in Bali, MC10 in Nairobi and MC11 in Buenos Aires. It is worth mentioning that:

- In 2013 you have successfully facilitated the 'Bali Package' which included steps on agriculture and food security for the Least-Developed Countries, as well as the Trade Facilitation Agreement
- In 2015 in Nairobi you helped to deliver another package of major negotiated outcomes, including the elimination of agricultural export subsidies and the expansion of the WTO's Information Technology Agreement.
- In 2017 you aided the entry into force of the amendment to the TRIPS Agreement.

Director-General, we are grateful for all that you have done for this organization and for the Membership.

My delegation acknowledges that under your able guidance, vision, dedication and, more importantly, enthusiasm, you have led Members to achieve these inclusive and meaningful outcomes.

Your departure leaves the organization with 'big shoes to fill'. Numerous challenges await the new leadership. We hope that you can still contribute to this organization from afar.

On a personal note, I feel sad for not having been able to work with you for a longer period.

Lastly, we would like to express our appreciation and we wish you the best of success in your future endeavours. *Jumpa lagi*, Roberto!

61. Togo

Togo associates itself with the statements made by the African Group, the ACP Group and the LDC Group.

I wish to avail myself of this opportunity to express the great pleasure I have had to work with you since I have been stationed here in Geneva. In addition to all your outstanding characteristics, I would like to pay tribute to your commitment to the multilateral trading system. You have been able to establish the WTO as one of the key pillars of international institutions.

Despite tremendous challenges, you have been able to make a number of great achievements that previous delegations have highlighted. The adoption and implementation of the Agreement on Trade Facilitation, the ITA Expansion, the Decision on Export Competition and the increase in trade in many areas, among others, are to be commended.

You have committed yourself to continue to advocate and defend the multilateral trading system wherever you might be. You told us this when you announced your departure. This is a tremendous asset for the organization which we will always rely upon. The uncertainties that await the future of this system due to the effects of the pandemic, further confirm that we need to undertake a thorough reform of the organization. We need to break the deadlock and attend to the Members' needs.

To conclude, I would like to wish you all the success in your future projects and every happiness to you and your family.

62. Cameroon

Mr. Director-General, my delegation would like to express its gratitude on behalf of the Government of Cameroon for all the efforts you deployed in defending the interest of the multilateral trading system. You highlighted very deftly in your introduction all the work accomplished, the success both great and small. You have shown extreme qualities as a diplomat, deep commitment, a sense of pragmatism, realism – all of these have enabled you to show great wisdom to stir a difficult course towards results that are accessible to all. You have done more than this. You have consolidated the foundations of this organization. For all of these, Cameroon is deeply grateful.

We would have liked to continue this adventure with you. However, that is not to be. We are comforted by the idea that you will continue to travel by our side. Cameroon relies on your support. We wish to pay tribute to you and your whole family – your wife in particular, and to all of those who have surrounded you including your staff and those who have enabled you to reach the achievements that you have accomplished. We wish you all the best for the future.

63. New Zealand

Mr. Director-General,

It is with great regret today that we mark your departure from this organization. We know that this is not an easy decision for you. You have served as Director-General with resolve and distinction since your commencement in 2013. Much has been achieved in your tenure. Under your stewardship,

the WTO has delivered the Agreement on Trade Facilitation, an expanded Information Technology Agreement and the elimination of agricultural export subsidies. You have also fostered an environment that has facilitated important joint initiatives and have helped put us in a right path towards concluding fisheries subsidies by the end of the year.

Transparency has also been a hallmark of your tenure. You have ensured inclusiveness in our critical decisions. You leave here having left an indelible mark on the multilateral trading system. We wish you every success in your next steps.

I have also been asked to extend New Zealand Minister for Trade and Export Growth David Parker's personal gratitude to you for your service and accomplishments as Director-General.

64. Myanmar

Myanmar associates itself with the statements made by ASEAN and the LDC Group.

I would like to join other Members in bidding farewell to Director-General Azevêdo. We would like to thank and commend him for his able leadership and dedication to the WTO over the last seven years. We witnessed that, though the WTO faced many challenges during the past seven years, DG Azevêdo has been able to bring a number of significant milestones to the multilateral trading system, including the Agreement on Trade Facilitation.

The COVID-19 pandemic has showed the need to maintain and strengthen the rules-based multilateral trading system for a balanced and renewed economic stability. There is no doubt that taking on additional challenges for this organization to co-exist with the new normal while performing WTO work need to be done. Even in his time of departure, DG Azevêdo has vouched for a successful MC12 and smooth transition and shown his passion for this organization.

We are very thankful for his effort, creativity and contributions for flexible negotiations. We will always remember DG Azevêdo and his dynamic personality. We wish DG Azevêdo and Ambassador Lelé, happiness and every success in their future endeavours.

65. Gabon

Gabon associates itself with the statements made by the African Group and the ACP. We would like to make a tribute to Director-General Roberto Azevêdo for his leadership – expressing our deep recognition for the considerable work that he has achieved within the WTO. I do not even need to go through the multifaceted successes that you have achieved during your term. I would simply, on behalf of my country Gabon, wish you the fullest of success in your future endeavours and our best wishes to you and your family.

66. Paraguay

Mr. Director-General, Paraguay associates with the statement made by GRULAC. We join others in wishing you all the best – thanking you for the seven years of work in leading our organization. Paraguay thanks you for your leadership, openness and dedication as Director-General in addressing the interests of the Members of our region that in our case even led to a successful official visit to Paraguay in 2015. For this reason, and for so many more, we congratulate you for your contribution to the multilateral trading system. I am sure that the legacy that you are leaving us here in Geneva will always be marked in the history of our organization.

Finally, a particular greeting to Ambassador Lelé. We hope to continue working with you on UN issues. So, it is not a goodbye. it is a see you soon.

67. Qatar

We express our sincere gratitude and appreciation to the Director-General for his commitment to the multilateral trading system and his tireless work in moving this organization forward. We recognise your efforts during the negotiations of the Agreement on Trade Facilitation and for multilateralism. We likewise recognise that you have played an integral role in aligning divergent views between Members and bringing consensus to the table.

We in the State of Qatar understand the difficulty of attaining such an achievement when we hosted the Doha Ministerial Conference in 2001. We are therefore very grateful for all your efforts and leadership in this regard. We would also like to highlight other successes that were achieved during your leadership of this organization. The list is very long. In particular, we would like to highlight your focus on the accession of new Members to the WTO. That is due to your commitment to inclusivity especially among developing and LDC Members.

Throughout the past seven years, not only did you manage to achieve to conclude the multilateral trade agreements, but more recently you managed to lead and stir the organization during turbulent and difficult times. In addition, you managed to do it with utmost professionalism, inclusivity and transparency despite the hardships.

When you announced your decision to leave this post, it was indeed a sad moment for all of us. However, we respect your decision and wish you all the success in your future endeavours, as we are confident that you will continue to advocate for the multilateral trading system. You are no stranger to Doha. We hope that you will visit Doha again in the future, perhaps not for a Ministerial Conference, but for other more entertaining occasions such as the World Cup in 2022 where you can support your national team of Brazil.

In conclusion, we wish you and your family all the happiness and prosperity while you commence on a new chapter in your life.

68. Peru

Peru associates itself with the statement made by GRULAC.

Dear Roberto, we thank you for your efforts and time dedicated to our institution. Your commitment, talent and intelligence have been placed at the service of all Members, allowing us to bring this organization to far more areas and environments for work and in line with the 21st century. This has been repeated many times today in this room.

I simply want to mention one of these moments for being particularly sensitive in this rare and difficult time – the seed of which you have sown to allow us to continue cultivating and leaving it to future generations. This is the economic empowerment of women. This is an important and urgent issue not only for Latin America but for the whole world.

For Peru, it has been a source of great pride to have you, a distinguished representative of Latin America, leading this House over the past seven years. We would like to thank you as we can always count on your advice to guide us in the very difficult tasks that weigh in the future at this unprecedented time.

We would like to wish you, Ambassador Lelé and your entire family a life full of happiness. Thank you very much.

69. Mexico

Mr. Director-General,

We would like to reiterate the statement made by GRULAC. Additionally, we recognise the valuable leadership that you have assumed in this organization. We thank you for the kind and respectful manner in which you have always interacted with us. We recognise the great value of the decision that you took to leave your position early. This reflects the great deal of professionalism and your deep commitment to the multilateral trading system. You have our best wishes for your future professional undertakings, and we hope that you will have the time to enjoy your dear and growing family.

70. Colombia

Mr. Director-General, to list all your achievements would take up all the time you have assigned us today. And I do not want to do that today. I simply want to say that the Membership of the WTO deeply recognises your efforts and your achievements. On behalf of my country and of all the officials of my mission to this organization, I would like to thank you and your team for all your contributions to this organization which have been fundamental for the international economy.

I had the opportunity to share a short seminar in Bogota with you in May 2016. For your words at that event and for some of the ideas that we managed to exchange there for a few moments, I took away an impression of you that I still maintain and that I have been able to confirm day by day since. This is an image, an idea of your personal and professional devotion and interest in the multilateral trading system and to this organization. This has been once again confirmed with your decision to leave your post one year early which is, as you explained, a decision in favour of the system.

I must say that at that time I found it difficult to imagine that a few years later, on the day of my birthday, I was going to be sitting in your office presenting my credentials to you to work together with you on different areas, particularly on the fisheries subsidies negotiations. I thank you for your continued support and your always kind advice for this. We will deeply miss you as we will successfully close these negotiations, because there will be a successful end to these negotiations.

In your time at the WTO, we have seen your leadership wearing different hats and we have been able to address you as Director-General, Coordinator, Chair, Counsellor, and we have been able to add certain personal designations that we thank you for. You are a visionary – respectful and generous. Today I would like to add another designation to this list, perhaps a role which is also a personal characteristic which I hope would last in time and that is "friend".

I would like to reiterate my country's deep thanks to you and I should also add to your family for sharing you with us to the benefit of this House that we all share. We wish you the fullest of success and happiness in what is to come in your professional and in your personal life.

71. Hong Kong, China

I would like to express Hong Kong, China's sincere appreciation to the outgoing Director-General for his calm leadership even at challenging times, his contributions to the work of the WTO and especially his commitment to the multilateral trading system.

Director-General, among your many talents and strengths, your exceptional ability to build trust and forge consensus across the diverse Membership has been most impressive to us, and I would join others in wishing you all the best in whatever you are going to do next.

72. Liechtenstein

Dear Roberto, Liechtenstein wishes to add its voice to all colleagues bidding farewell to you and paying tribute to your strong personal commitment to the rules-based global trading system and the WTO which are very dear to our heart. We deeply appreciate your strong leadership and tireless efforts to bring the agenda of the WTO forward and to keep the WTO relevant. As many have done, I would just like to mention the crucial role you played to make the Agreement on Trade Facilitation happen in Bali. We would also like to express our gratitude to you for strengthening transparency and inclusiveness in the WTO just to mention the set of formal TNC meetings. Being one of the smallest Members of the WTO, this is of particular importance to my country.

Thank you again for all your contributions to the multilateral trading system throughout your career – a career dedicated to the WTO both as Brazilian diplomat but in particular in your role as Director-General of the organization. For your future endeavours, we wish you every success. Our appreciation and best wishes go also to your dear wife and my dear colleague at the UN, Lelé, present here in the room. As I am also Ambassador to the UN, I also had and still have the privilege to work with you. All the best to you both and to your family. *Tchau!*

73. Georgia

Let me take this opportunity to join the previous speakers in extending our deep appreciation and heartfelt thanks to Director-General Roberto Azevêdo.

Mr. Director-General, on behalf of the Government of Georgia, let me express our deepest gratitude to you for your tireless efforts, dedication, commitment and outstanding leadership which you have been brilliantly demonstrating during these challenging times for the multilateral trading system. We would also wish to thank you for your personal engagement and immense contribution aimed at further strengthening and fostering the rules-based multilateral trading system. In conclusion, we would like to wish you all the best and success in your future endeavours, be it professional or personal.

74. Saint Lucia (CARICOM)

It is often difficult, if not impossible, to judge the quality of any human endeavour contemporaneously, for progress is sometimes measured by a series of small, sometimes indefinable steps that ultimately constitutes a journey or even an odyssey. It is therefore usual for the value of those small steps to be judged only from the distance of time. But in some unique instances, we can assess the impact of those small incremental steps.

During your tenure, Director-General, over the past seven years, we have seen the value of those small and very meaningful steps. We see those impacts and the impacts in the global norms and standards related to the facilitation of trade. We see those impacts in the restraints agreed on export competition in Nairobi. We see those impacts in our collective contemplation of new trade rules for the 21st century on digital trade and e-commerce.

Indeed, we see those impacts in the swift response of the Secretariat in providing us with real-time data on trade performance and trade restrictive measures at the onset of the pandemic. We see those impacts in the meaningful technical assistance programmes which have been instituted, such as the Young Professionals Programme that will ultimately groom a new cohort of trade experts that will someday succeed us.

Each one of those small and maybe even indiscernible steps doubtlessly but collectively form a strong legacy. Your contribution to the organization and of course more broadly to multilateralism is beyond question. The CARICOM Group therefore takes this opportunity to sincerely thank you for your contribution as well as your close friendship. We wish you and your family all the very best, secure in the knowledge of your indelible contribution to the cause of development.

75. Liberia

Liberia associates itself with the statements made by the African Group and the ACP Group.

I would like to convey Liberia's appreciation especially for the level of support you, Director-General, offered Liberia during our struggling days to become a Member of this noble organization. We thank you ever so much and we are grateful to you. We hope this is not a goodbye. Rather, we hope to see you again somehow somewhere. Let me conclude by wishing you and your family a wonderful and promising future. *Tchau!*

76. Zambia

Zambia associates itself with the statements made by the African Group, the LDC Group and the ACP Group.

My delegation wishes to join others in thanking Director-General Roberto Azevêdo for his report to this meeting which sadly also marks his last General Council meeting in his capacity as Director-General and Chair of the TNC. My delegation wishes to thank you for your tireless contributions to the important work of the WTO, particularly your efforts and support towards LDCs.

For Zambia, we greatly appreciate the development-centred work programmes that you spearheaded and championed which include the Trade Facilitation Agreement Facility, the EIF programmes, Aid for Trade and the many capacity building and technical assistance programmes

dedicated to LDCs for which Zambia has been a big beneficiary during your tenure as Director-General.

Mr. Azevêdo, your contributions and achievements are not limited to those just aforementioned but in the interest of time and also not wanting to sound repetitive since both of the things have already been said by those who have spoken before me, I would therefore end here. I just wish you the very best in your future endeavours.

77. The Gambia

The Gambia associates itself with the statements made by the African Group, the ACP Group and the LDC Group.

At the outset, my delegation wishes to thank Director-General Azevêdo for his report and farewell statement. My country wishes to further thank you and register our appreciation of your exemplary leadership and achievements during your tenure as Director-General of the WTO over the last seven years. You are a true professional and a diplomat par excellence. The statements and compliments made by my colleagues are testimony to this. In conclusion and on behalf of my country, we wish you and your family good health, happiness and all the best in your future endeavours.

78. Brunei Darussalam

Brunei Darussalam associates itself with the statement made by the ASEAN Group.

We join the many others who have acknowledged the achievement of the Director-General during his tenure from the many deliverables of the Ministerial Conferences in Bali in 2013 and in Nairobi in 2015. In particular, outcomes such as the expansion of the Information Technology Agreement, the elimination of export subsidies in agriculture, as well as the conclusion of the Agreement on Trade Facilitation have shown concrete proof to the world of the continued relevance of this organization.

For small missions like Brunei Darussalam, the ability to attend and participate in the informal TNC and HODs meetings had been especially invaluable and we very much appreciate the contribution to making the WTO more inclusive and transparent. This has been particularly important as the Director-General has guided us so ably during these challenging and difficult times of the current pandemic.

Thank you for your leadership and guidance. Your many contributions to the multilateral trading system will not be forgotten. We wish you and your family every success in your next and new adventures.

79. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Arab Group)

I would like to express our sincere thanks and gratitude to you, Director-General, for your able leadership and outstanding efforts over the past seven years. You have been a patient, committed and determined leader. I would like to also commend you on all the achievements that you have made during your tenure for the WTO and the multilateral trading system.

We appreciate your efforts in the G20 and your commitment to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. Your message was very clear to the G20 Trade Ministers at the Virtual Gathering that took place on 30 March when you urged them to lead the way in using trade to lower the cost in fighting the pandemic and to lay the foundation of a strong economic recovery.

I wish you and your wonderful wife and family all the best in your future endeavours. Roberto, remember that I know you and the thought of our friendship makes me happier. Thank you very much.

80. Kazakhstan

Dear Roberto, on behalf of the Government of Kazakhstan I would like to express our sincere gratitude to you, Director-General, for your tremendous efforts and hard work for the benefit of the multilateral trading system and the organization over the last seven years. I also would like to join previous speakers and highlight your leadership in the conclusion of key multilateral agreements, including the Agreement on Trade Facilitation, the ITA Expansion and the Decision on the Elimination of Agriculture Export Subsidies, among others.

Let me also use this opportunity to express our sincere thanks and appreciation for your strong support for Kazakhstan's accession process to the WTO. With your personal dedication, commitment and professional engagement, you played a key role in addressing highly sensitive issues of geopolitical nature through your discussions with Heads of State and Ministers of Trade of partner countries who were involved in our accession process. It was a great honour for us to share with you the important moment of becoming a full-fledged Member of the WTO exactly five years ago, on 27 July 2015 in this very room where the accession package of Kazakhstan was adopted by the General Council, and yourself and our first President Nazarbayev have signed the accession package of Kazakhstan.

I would also like to mention that you paid two visits to my capital. In your accession statement at the General Council meeting, you mentioned that the accession of Kazakhstan may mark the end of one journey, but it also marks the start of another journey. As a full-fledged Member of the WTO, Kazakhstan expresses its full support to the organization by offering to host the Ministerial Conference next year in Nur-Sultan. I would also like to highlight that this happened with your personal involvement, as well as with your blessing. We also regret that you will not be able to participate in the next Ministerial Conference in your capacity as Director-General. We look forward to welcoming you in my capital in your new capacity.

In conclusion, I also would like to wish you and your wife, Lelé, who is my friend, and your family all the best in your future endeavours.
