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Page: 1/2

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UKRAINE

At the outset, on behalf of Ukraine I would like to express sincere appreciation to the WTO Secretariat and all Members, whose great efforts have made this Conference possible. It is a great honor to have a privilege to represent and speak for the millions of Ukrainians, who have been suffering because of the hideous, unprovoked and unjustified war, launched against Ukraine by the WTO Member, the Russian Federation.

This Ministerial Conference takes place at a truly difficult time of unprecedented pressure on international trade, financial and food security, as we are witnessing, without exaggeration, one of the most horrendous blows on the multilateral trading system in modern history.

Starting with the COVID-19 pandemic, which drastically affected trade flows and countries' economies, Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 24th February 2022 further exacerbated existing problems, as well as created a lot of new ones. The world has already started to feel its devastating repercussions: destabilization of markets, looming danger of food crisis, another surge in inflation, shutdown of enterprises due to the loss of supply chains, destruction of international trade routes, one of the biggest migration crises since World War II, and worsening expectations of economic agents. These negative trends are expected to continue over the next few years.

In this war Ukraine pays the highest price - human, infrastructural, economic. More than USD 600 billion in direct losses. More than 7 million Ukrainians have been forced to seek asylum abroad. More than 12 million Ukrainians left their homes. One third of Ukrainian enterprises do not work.

Under these unprecedented circumstances, I would like to thank the Members that express their full support for Ukraine, for strong response to the invasion and measures taken for security reasons.

In times like these, Ukraine strongly believes that Members should look for a coordinated approach for tackling current and emerging issues and challenges for the good of the whole membership.

My country remains committed to a predictable, rules-based multilateral trading system and believes it is imperative to continue addressing issues that lie at the heart of the existing problems in international trade and recognizes the need to strengthen the WTO, with a view to ensuring the continued viability and effectiveness of its dispute settlement, negotiating and monitoring functions.

Ukraine supports Members' efforts to build a fair and predictable trading system, to improve the existing trade rules and to develop new ones, including focus their work within WTO on achieving Sustainable Development Goals. In this context, Ukraine fully supports the need to eliminate certain forms of fisheries subsidies that contribute to excessive and irresponsible use of marine resources, causing substantial depletion or even complete destruction of such resources.

Being one of the world's largest exporters of agricultural goods, namely, wheat, maize, rapeseed, sunflower seeds and oil, and according to experts, 400 million people in the world depend on Ukraine's grain supplies, my country has made great contributions to ensure global food security and achieve SDGs.

Having started a full-scale war against our state, russia blocked our ports on the Black and Azov Seas. There is a complete blockade of our agricultural exports, and this, in turn, is the path to a large-scale crisis in the global food market. If we cannot export wheat, barley, corn, vegetable oil, in the countries of North Africa and in various regions of Asia by the end of this year there will be a physical shortage of food and prices will rise significantly.

In this regard, by acknowledging the impediments that russia created to export of agricultural products by blocking our seaports and illegally exporting grain from temporarily occupied territories, Ukraine is convinced that MC12 has to deliver concrete results on the long-overdue agriculture reform with a view to encouraging transition to more sustainable agriculture practices that would ensure availability of nutritious food for generations to come.

Besides, climate change remains a significant global challenge. Moreover, right now we are facing the russian military forces' shelling targeting oil depots, gas pipelines and coke plants, which can potentially lead to air and soil pollution from the toxic products of open combustion and affect goods' production and quality (especially agricultural ones) not just in Ukraine, but in neighboring countries as well. Hence, while we support the WTO Members' activities aimed at environmental conservation and containment of global average temperature increase, we would like to avoid a situation in which environmental policy is used as an instrument of discrimination and pressure on less developed trading partners, rather it is crucial for it to become more resilient to answer possible ecological problems.

We emphasize that all trade-related environmental measures should be developed in compliance with WTO rules, UNFCCC and Paris agreement and not create unjustified barriers to trade.

We are confident that only the coherent work of all WTO members will ensure the balance of trade and environmental interests and needs of all stakeholders, provide equal opportunities for all participants in international trade and, as a result, will lead to significant progress in combating climate change and preventing new environmental challenges.

While Ukraine is interested in reinvigorating of multilateral trade negotiations, we would like to welcome results of the Joint Statement Initiatives on services domestic regulation, e-commerce and informal Working Groups on Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises and on trade and gender. We consider this approach could give an additional impetus to the process of revitalizing multilateral trade negotiations.

In addition, I would like to note that russia's horrific acts in its war against Ukraine, which is contrary to the purposes and values of the WTO, brings at the forefront the issue of urgent need to elaborate on the efficient instruments to preserve the ability of the WTO to function effectively and to diminish the influence of aggressor country in the Organization. The aggressor should bear the full responsibility for its actions, which paralyze ability of other countries to participate and benefit from the multilateral trading system.

It is crucial to remember that the fundamental goal of the WTO is to improve people's lives. And that's what should be the basis of all our work within the Organisation. Yet, before anything else, we ought to maintain effective work of the WTO and protect the main principles it is based on.

I would like to conclude by repeating that this Ministerial Conference comes at a difficult time, and therefore it is of great importance that our work contributes to the achievement of meaningful results.

MC12 will be over in couple of days, but we should continue our work in this new reality with a view to ensure recovery and further development of international trade to the benefit of people.