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CZECH REPUBLIC

First of all, let me express our gratitude to the Government of Kazakhstan and of Switzerland for organizing and hosting the Conference.

I would also like to express our sincere appreciation for Director-General Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala and her team for all their efforts to make this important event happen.

The Czech Republic would also like to support the statement of the EU presented earlier by Executive Vice-President Dombrovskis.

Let me share a few of my thoughts on the WTO, its place in the global economic architecture and our expectations from the organization in these very difficult times.

My country represents one of the most open economies in the world. In our experience, it is the predictability of the system based on the WTO rules and principles that brings benefits to our businesses and the economy as a whole.

We have been defending the multilateral trading system since its creation.

The organization has certainly gone through very tough times – through globalization anxiety, financial crisis, economic tensions, mistrust and the pandemic.

Furthermore, the global community finds itself going from one unprecedented crisis to another. From the Covid crisis to the Russian aggression against Ukraine. Consequences of these crises pose numerous challenges to the WTO. Can the WTO manage orderly economic relations between its Members, when one of the members wages an undeclared and illegal war against another? When a member blocks food exports of another Member by military means, and the rest of the world finds itself on the verge of inflation, unrest and hunger? When fossil fuels are becoming a tool in the hybrid conflict forcing the global community to reconsider its green transition efforts and its energy security?

So far, the foundations and core principles of the WTO have proven their resilience. We do need them in the future to govern our basic economic relations. We do need them as a platform to build upon while seeking deeper and closer cooperation.

And let me recall, negotiations have delivered concrete results in the past.

In this spirit, I have a few messages to my fellow Ministers:

Firstly, the WTO needs an overall reform to accommodate its diverse membership and different priorities. This should cover a range of issues: transparency, functioning dispute settlement or stronger subsidy rules, to name just a few. We should strive to gradually improve and strengthen the existing rules, not weaken them.

Secondly, we support all the efforts leading to finalizing the ongoing negotiations at this Conference. I, therefore, call on Members to engage in good faith in the coming few days. Several outcomes are

within our reach: agreement on fisheries subsidies, the WTO response to the pandemic and the declaration on food security. In this context I would like to emphasize the key role of the WTO at a time when the world is concerned about the risk of famine in Africa and the least developed countries.

Thirdly, we should continue working on joint initiatives addressing some of the most relevant issues. Creating new rules and principles for the digital economy is a prime example that can help our business grow. We welcome the deepening of cooperation in trade and environmental sustainability. And we hope to see the first results by the next Conference.

As our former president Václav Havel once said: "*If our present crisis inspires us to new deeds, that will give our identity a renewed meaning, we have no reason to regret that it has come.*" The WTO will only be successful with the support and real commitment of its Members. This Conference can become a turning point. The Czech Republic is ready to make its contribution, particularly as an upcoming EU presidency.

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