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**STATEMENT BY H.E. MR MANLIO DI STEFANO
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ITALY

In 2021, Italy held the Presidency of the G20. All our efforts were directed at reviving multilateralism also in the trade sector and facilitating an ambitious result here in Geneva at the MC12, but, unfortunately, this is still far from certain.

Unluckily we are not in a situation of business as usual. Russia's unprovoked and unjustified military aggression on Ukraine is affecting people in all corners of the world. The flagrant breach of the United Nations Charter shakes not only Ukraine but the entire rules-based international order. Countries that have been struggling to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic now face further challenges related to food and nutrition security, energy and commodity prices.

Contrary to Russia's disinformation, these impacts are not caused by the sanctions, which are fully in line with the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, but by the invasion of Ukraine. They are the responsibility of Russia, and wholly avoidable.

We strongly support, therefore, as an outcome of the 12th WTO Ministerial Conference, a strong focus on a multilateral food security package. This means a commitment to avoiding export restrictions on food, transparency improvements on export restrictions and transparency on stocks, and the decision exempting World Food Program humanitarian purchases from export restrictions.

When it comes to the response to the pandemic, we should focus on eliminating burdensome barriers, increasing transparency and keeping markets open particularly for vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics. The global production of vaccines has steadily increased, and the intellectual property system has been an enabler. The common goal of global equitable access to COVID vaccines is however yet to be achieved. Our joint work here should further contribute in concrete terms to fully overcoming the pandemic and making sure we are equipped for similar cases in the future.

A renewed focus is also needed on level-playing field. The current rules have been unable to counter market-distorting practices, and we would like to see greater efforts in re-establishing fair competition. The imbalances in the level-playing field also represent an obstacle to market access. Market access commitments are, indeed, increasingly disconnected from the economic realities of the 21st century.

Distinguished Delegates, trade is an engine for growth, but we should strive for more inclusive and equitable growth, we should think about how to close the gender gap and how to integrate young people and vulnerable communities. Micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) are often the gate for those groups to benefit from international trade, and it is important to promote their access to information, transparency and a more predictable regulatory environment.

Another paramount step to show that the WTO is not detached from reality is to open our eyes and finally acknowledge the existence of global environmental challenges and, in particular, climate change. We must reaffirm mutual support between trade and environmental policies. Nothing represents this better than our efforts to complete the fisheries subsidies negotiation, which has at its core the concern for the sustainability of our oceans and their fish fauna.

This is why we also encourage as many members as possible to join the Trade and Environmental Sustainability Structured Discussions. These are all significant and necessary steps towards a trade that is respectful of our common planet and preserves the environment where we all live.

Your Excellencies, before modernizing the agenda we must reform the WTO. In order to make sure it delivers, its rulemaking, monitoring and dispute settlement functions should be strengthened and updated to be fit for the XXI century. Without a well-functioning dispute settlement system, we cannot provide security and predictability to multilateral trade. Maintaining the integrity of the trading system and the correct monitoring of commitments is essential. Fostering the update of the global trade rulebook, for example, to cover digital trade, is finally paramount for strengthening the rulemaking function.

As we all know, the WTO is confronted with many challenges. Wide-ranging reforms are needed to restore and relaunch the organization as a key pillar of trade global governance and a more effective instrument for inclusive growth and prosperity and sustainable development. It is, indeed, a difficult and urgent task, which can only be achieved if we all work together in a committed, constructive and forward-looking way and I can assure you that Italy, together with the European Union and its other Member States, is ready and willing to do its part!
