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NORWAY

It is in the darkest hours that we most appreciate the light. It is in times of lawlessness that we best understand the importance of rule of law. It is when international law is broken that we recognise the true value of a rules-based world order.

Russia's violent attack on Ukraine shows a blatant disregard for international law and institutions. This senseless war is causing suffering far beyond the borders of Ukraine. The most vulnerable are being hit the hardest.

Russia's aggression demonstrates the importance of respecting and protecting a world order based on cooperation and common rules. The WTO is an integral part of this order. This conference is an opportunity to remind ourselves of -- and recommit to -- the values and principles underpinning this organisation.

The global food security situation has deteriorated significantly over the past months. An already challenging situation has been further compounded by Russia's war against Ukraine.

None of us are completely self-sufficient, and none of us rely exclusively on imports to cover our domestic food security needs. A well-functioning trading system plays an important role in contributing to food security. But countries also need to maintain an adequate level of domestic production. It is always a matter of finding the right balance. The current situation shows us just how delicate that balance is.

MC12 provides an opportunity to exchange views on how we - the members - can respond most efficiently to the current food crisis, and to send a strong signal that food security is high on our agenda.

Many countries are still struggling with the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences. COVID-19 has been a litmus test for international cooperation and solidarity, including here in the WTO. We should all acknowledge that there are lessons to be learned.

MC12 offers us an opportunity as WTO members to send a strong message. Not only about our common resolve to meet the challenges related to the current pandemic, but also about being better prepared for future health crises. This should include addressing the role of intellectual property rights. My government is ready to support a compromise on patents on vaccines.

We are closer to an agreement on fisheries subsidies than ever before. While the draft text is not all that we hoped for, it will discipline members. This agreement will assist the global community in ensuring that our oceans and our marine resources are healthy and sustainable. Without an agreement, there will certainly be less discipline.

This is not an agreement about fish. It is about people. All the people who depend on marine resources for their livelihood and as a source of food. It is about future generations. We must not waste this opportunity.

Agriculture is important to virtually all WTO members. Our sensitivities in this area are well known. In Norway, the growing season is short, the climate is difficult, and our farmland is both limited and scattered in small patches.

Support for, and protection of, our agricultural sector remains crucial to safeguard non-trade concerns such as domestic food security, rural development, and environmental concerns.

We will, however, always engage constructively with other members. We are ready to work on the basis of a balanced work programme that does not prejudice the outcome of negotiations.

Norway might not be a major power. But we have an open economy, highly dependent on international trade. Safeguarding the rules-based multilateral trading system is therefore Norway's primary trade policy priority. And the best way to safeguard the multilateral trading system is to ensure that it delivers and stays relevant.

Our first task is to make sure that the organisation functions efficiently. Restoring a fully functional dispute settlement system is fundamental and should be our first priority. We also need to improve the WTO's monitoring and deliberative functions. This includes enhancing transparency and improving the work of WTO committees.

Furthermore, we need to strengthen the WTO's negotiating function so we can better respond to the economic and trade realities of the 21st century. Social and economic development. Environmental sustainability including climate change. Women's economic empowerment. The digital economy.

Addressing global challenges requires global cooperation.

A stable world order requires common rules that are implemented and respected.

It is within our power, as members, to deliver results here at MC12. On food security. On the WTO's response to the pandemic. And on fisheries subsidies. As well as launching a work programme on agriculture and a collaborative effort to reform the WTO.

The alternative to the rule of law is not an option. We need an efficient and relevant WTO now more than ever.
