MC12 Opening Session

Statement by H.E. mr. Timur Suleimenov (Kazakhstan)  
CHAIRman OF THE twelfTH MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE

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Ministers last met almost half a decade ago. A lot has happened since then. The world, the multilateral trading system and the WTO have faced unprecedented challenges. We are currently living in a once-in-a-generational period that demands collective action from all of us. And MC12 presents a unique opportunity for us to make this happen.

Over the next three days, the world's eyes are on the WTO. We have a chance to address some of the major challenges facing the global economy.

Kazakhstan joined the WTO only in 2015 with big aspirations and hopes in the future of the rules based multilateral trading system. Despite being the largest landlocked country located at the heart of Eurasia, Kazakhstan has played an important role in deepening trade and investment cooperation between Europe and Asia, and despite the difficult times we remain firmly committed to strengthening "trade and integration" and "peace and security" through the multilateral platforms, including here in Geneva.

More than two years ago, we were all struck by an unprecedented health crisis, and I want to thank all Members – especially delegates in Geneva – for their tireless engagement in advancing the work on the WTO Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic, including the TRIPS Waiver.

My heartfelt thanks also go to the Director-General for her work with various stakeholders and international organizations. My deep gratitude goes to the General Council Chair, the TRIPS Council Chair and the Facilitator on the pandemic response for their excellent leadership and engagement in this endeavour.

Addressing the pandemic is an issue of utmost priority – both regarding intellectual property and trade-related aspects. Should WTO Members agree on such a framework at this Conference, whenever the next pandemic comes, our collective attention would be entirely focused on saving lives. Based on the experience and lessons learned from the current pandemic we must build effective solutions for the future.

As the world continues to experience the negative effects of COVID-19, it is faced with another crisis – ongoing, unsettling and worsening food insecurity. Between 720 and 811 million people in the world faced hunger in 2020 - around one in 10, according to UN estimates. Families across the globe experience food shortages and are faced with the rising prices of staple food commodities. Hunger is on the rise, and it is our responsibility to deliver meaningful results to help address this issue.

As WTO Members, we have a duty to develop predictable international markets in sustainable and inclusive manner.

In order for us to make the WTO more responsive to the challenges the world faces today, more relevant in the face of the two global emergencies in front of us, we need to strengthen this organization and reform it.

Ensuring that our multilateral negotiating instrument remains fully functioning is very critical – especially for the most vulnerable amongst us who rely on the WTO to have their voices heard on trade-related issues.

Over the coming days, I will be counting on your good will and your flexibility and open hearts to build the necessary convergence to achieve credible outcomes on agriculture, fisheries subsidies, as well as on the number of other important issues for our consideration.

This week, the Ministers have an opportunity to provide both guidance and impetus on how agriculture negotiations will be carried forward here in Geneva in the coming years. We also have an opportunity to finally curb harmful fisheries subsidies through a balanced package, taking into consideration a core principle of this house: special and differential treatment.

In addition, we owe the world a Declaration that captures our collective resolve and commitment to our future work. It has been close to a decade since Ministers agreed on a multilateral Ministerial Declaration. Let us not deprive this organization of the political guidance that is genuinely needed – particularly during these difficult times.

Outstanding work has been done in Geneva to prepare a draft outcome document for MC12, and I appreciate the tireless efforts by the General Council Chairman and his predecessor, as well as the positive engagement by Members. We are extremely grateful to you. I understand that several issues remain to be addressed – and I urge all of you to exercise the necessary flexibility and political will to get this job done here in Geneva.

In this regard, one crucial issue in the document is Reform. All WTO Members agree on the importance of effecting meaningful reforms to strengthen the functioning of this organization. We have a chance to set the stage for future work on WTO reform, to make it fit-for-purpose. Let us seize this opportunity – now.

Excellencies, the task at hand is clear. There are many issues on the table, and we have very little time ahead of us to address them. Rest assured that the Director-General, the General Council Chair and myself are here for you every step of the way.

Kazakhstan is a firm believer in the Multilateral Trading System, in the WTO, and in our collective drive and ability to deliver. With this in mind, I look forward to working with the Director-General, the General Council Chairman and all Ministers. Throughout this work, you can count on my unwavering support and determination. As the Chair of MC12, I will spare no effort in helping to bridge gaps to secure a meaningful Ministerial Conference.

Let us now roll up our sleeves and get to work. I thank all of you and I wish good luck to all of us.

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