

World Trade Organization General Council, July 2022: UK statements

General Item

First of all, as I wasn't here on 7th July, let me say a formal congratulations to the DG, Secretariat and Kazakhstan as Chair who played such a vital role at the Ministerial Conference. It was a remarkable result for this organisation and for the trading system, but also for multilateralism, at a time when people have questioned whether multilateralism can stand up to the challenges of those who question the rules-based system.

Let me pick up three small points; the first is about implementation. Let me welcome the work that you Chair and the secretariat are doing to set out how it is we are going to implement the outcomes of MC12 and I think that is a really important piece of work to keep us focused on implementation. And let me, like others, flag two particular areas, one of which is the ratification of the fisheries agreement which after all, is a ground-breaking agreement for this organisation, our first environmental agreement and one of upmost importance to the world's fisheries and to communities that rely upon them. I agree with others that say we need press on with the work to build on that agreement, at the same time as you work to ratify what we have achieved, but also I would like to echo the Singaporean Ambassador's words on e-commerce. It was vital that we renewed that moratorium. It is vital that we keep our eyes on why that moratorium is so important to businesses across the world, developed, developing, micro-businesses as well as the largest businesses in the global economy. It is an enabler of digital growth across the global economy and one we need to sustain as we move forward.

Second point is about learning lessons from MC12. It was a success but we can do better and we must do better at MC13. Brazil has offered some really helpful suggestions in terms of addressing the frequency of our Ministerial meetings and we warmly welcome those proposals, but they're not enough, they're not enough. But we can and must do better, both in de-dramatising Ministerials but also to prepare better for them. Also to look at our working methods, to ensure that they meet the needs of the organisation of the 2020s.

Third on the substance. Others have already praised those who are departing our shores and welcomed those who are arriving in Geneva. I think the comments this morning remind us of what we are losing in this organisation. Their comments are absolutely on the spot of the substance of the issues that are facing us. And while we are right to congratulate ourselves of what we achieved at MC12, we must also be cognisant of what we did not manage to achieve at MC12, whether that be in agriculture, or in terms of services, digital trade, or green goods and services. As we look outside this room at the challenges we face with climate change, the Horn of Africa facing famine as a result of years of drought. As we face the challenges that have been posed to the global economy by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, we need to keep

our eyes on that bigger prize, of how this organisation. How global trade and the rules that we set enable the green transition and the transition to net-zero. How we can build respect for multilateral rules and the rules based order and we can ensure that the green transition delivers for everybody. Developed and developing, micro-businesses and bigger businesses for our workers, for our consumers, for our societies and our planet. In our effort to implement MC12, we must not lose sight of that bigger picture of how global trade can contribute to those wider common goals, thank you.

TRIPS Council Matters

First of all, let me start by thanking the Chair, the DG and others involved for delivering the WTO's response to the pandemic including the TRIPS Decision at MC12. That outcome was clearly important in demonstrating how trade can contribute to the response to the pandemic – it was an important outcome both substantively and for the credibility of the WTO.

As others have said today, the pandemic is clearly not over, and significant issues remain with vaccine equity and access.

The UK remains absolutely committed to addressing vaccine inequity and believes that the WTO is pivotal to help find solutions to address the current challenges we face, like manufacturing constraints and supply chain issues, including export restrictions and tariff barriers on COVID-19 critical products.

We have always maintained that IP is part of the response to the pandemic. We are focused on how the IP framework can continue being used to address real issues we are now seeing as the pandemic evolves.

I recall in that context the comments made on Friday by the Chief Executive of GAVI Seth Berkley, that we are now living in “a world of vaccine abundance” in which they are having to work with pharmaceutical companies to minimise wastage in the system. So we need to keep an eye on what is happening in the real world and not how we perceived the situation to be a year or two years ago.

The UK will continue to engage constructively and in good faith on discussions regarding an extension to therapeutics and diagnostics.

The appropriate forum for these discussions is the TRIPS Council. The UK's view on this issue and next steps is on the record from the last TRIPS Council, so I won't repeat it here.

We will be focused on doing our homework over the summer to ensure we can have an evidence-based and informed discussion we resume in September. And I hope that other members of this organisations do the same.

Least Developed Countries (LDCs) Graduation

We continue very much to celebrate LDC Graduation; it is a cause for celebration when a country graduates from that status.

But we do recognise – like others here – the challenges that LDCs face when graduating. And that's one reason why we will continue to provide a transition period and even more generous preferences on the eagerly awaited Developing Countries Trading Scheme, which we will be unveiling with great fanfare later this year.

And we share some of the frustration in this room in thinking that we probably could have achieved an outcome on this issue at MC12. We, for our part, tried to play our bit to try and establish common ground with other delegations. And we thank the Republic of Korea, amongst others, for their efforts to do the same.

So we thank the LDC Group for their flexibility, and for approaching these discussions in a spirit of compromise. Flexibility, openness, proactive compromises are going to be required from all of us if we are to reach a successful conclusion to this issue.

So we remain committed to working with other delegations here to help LDCs, and LDC Graduates, to integrate further into the multilateral trading system, and to enjoy the fruits of economic growth that flow from that.

Thank you very much.

Improved Notifications Compliance Proposal

Please allow me to say what has already been said, but let me just reiterate it. First of all we thank the work by the United States and the cosponsors, we thank them for the way they have engaged with other delegations on this. Transparency is an essential part of this organisation's work, we do it well, but we could do it better. That is what this proposal is all about, making our existing work better without new obligations but with some new incentives. Just as we came together at MC12, to find agreement on some issues on which different delegations had different concerns, I hope we can come together on this proposal, find consensus and improve the work of our organisation to the benefit of all Members, thank you.

Reform Proposal

It's clear that if you listen to this debate that we all want to see this organisation reformed, but we've all got very different ideas of what reform means, so I take due note of what is in this communication and the comments made by colleagues in this hall this morning. I think we ought to be aware that different Members have different views, different visions, and as we resume this work back in September under your guidance, your consultations, we need to find ways to find common ground as we did again, at the Ministerial, and not assume that any one vision can answer the needs of the organisation as a whole.