

WTO to establish "panel" to consider dispute raised by Hong Kong in respect of US' new requirement on origin marking

The World Trade Organization (WTO) Dispute Settlement Body (DSB) agreed at its meeting on February 22 (Geneva time) to Hong Kong's request to establish a "panel" to consider the dispute raised by Hong Kong with respect to the violation of WTO rules by the United States' (US') new requirement on origin marking for Hong Kong products.

The Permanent Representative of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of China to the WTO, Mr Laurie Lo, spoke at the DSB meeting. He reiterated Hong Kong's strong objection against the US' unilateral and irresponsible imposition of the new requirement on origin marking for Hong Kong products, and pointed out that the new requirement is not only unjustifiable, but is also inconsistent with a number of WTO rules, and it damages Hong Kong's interests as a WTO member. It is therefore necessary to set up a panel to follow up on the matter.

A spokesman for the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau said that so far 13 WTO members have indicated an interest to join meetings of the "panel" as third parties, and this shows their concern with the issue which involves the multilateral trading system and the equal rights of WTO members.

The HKSAR Government made the first request to the DSB at its meeting on January 25 to establish a panel to consider the dispute in accordance with the WTO Dispute Settlement Mechanism. According to the mechanism, after the complaining party has made a request, a panel shall be established at the latest at the DSB meeting following the meeting at which the request first appears as an item on the DSB's agenda.

The spokesman reiterated that pursuant to Articles 116, 151 and 152 of the Basic Law, the HKSAR is a separate customs territory and may, using the name "Hong Kong, China", participate in international organisations such as the WTO and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation as a separate member, and develop mutually beneficial economic and trade relations with economies around the world. The special status of Hong Kong has been widely recognised and respected by the international community, and Hong Kong's economic and trade status is on par with that of other WTO members. The "Made in Hong Kong" marking on Hong Kong products has been accepted internationally for many years. The marking not only conforms to Hong Kong's status as a separate customs territory and complies with WTO rules, but also provides consumers with clear and accurate information on product origin.