

General Council Meeting
(13-15 December 2023)

Hong Kong, China's Statement

Item 3. Follow-up to Outcomes of Ministerial Conferences

A. MC12 – (IV) Work Programme on Electronic Commerce

- Thank you, Chair.
- This is my first time taking the floor; I would like to go on record to say thanks to two well-respected departing colleagues – Kazu of Japan and George of Australia. Both have extended warm welcome to me when I returned to WTO three months ago after eight gap years. They have been very generous with their time in sharing their insights about the latest state of play of this Organisation. It is this kind of candid and collegial exchange that is badly needed in the WTO for it to move forward and make things happen. I wish Kazu all the best in his next endeavour in New York. As for George, I have not given up hope of his coming back again as an even more formidable negotiator with a golden heart. I would also take the opportunity to welcome Ambassador Mizu of South Africa, who is with us today.
- On the Work Programme on E-Commerce, HKC aligns ourselves with the statement made by Ambassador Bollinger of Switzerland on behalf of the co-sponsors, including HKC, of the draft MC13 Ministerial Decision in WT/GC/W/909/Rev.1.
- HKC cannot agree more about the excellent leadership of Ambassador Canabady in successfully reinvigorating the work under the Work Programme. We have seen sustained efforts to intensify evidence-based discussions in the past few months. Significant progress has been made this year. Given the evolving nature of e-commerce and its impact on bridging digital divide, we see the importance to continue discussions on trade-related topics in the Work Programme.
- On the moratorium, HKC's position is well known. I'd just like to raise the two red flags. First, if the moratorium were to lapse at MC13, this would be seen as a retrogression of the WTO in its mission to pursue progressive trade liberalisation. This would also run against commercial realities and aspirations of the international business sector, including MSMEs.

- Imagine who would be more vulnerable if the moratorium were to lapse and Members were at liberty to levy custom duties on electronic transmission. It would be the MSMEs in developing countries and LDCs that would be hard hit, and not the multinational giants in developed countries. We therefore call on Members to join the growing consensus across the WTO membership on extending the moratorium and consider co-sponsoring WT/GC/W/909/Rev1.
- Thank you.

Item 18. Information on Investment Facilitation for Development – Request from Chile and the Republic of Korea (JOB/GC/373)

- Thank you, Chair.
- HKC would like to start by expressing our appreciation to Ambassador Sofía BOZA (Chile) and Ambassador Jung Sung PARK (Korea) for leading over 110 participants in this Initiative. HKC is proud to be part of this journey and we join others in welcoming the finalisation of the English version of the IFD Agreement.
- Today, we have heard from the floor how the IFD Agreement could benefit WTO Members at all development stages, in particular the most vulnerable ones. I would recall that the ultimate goal of this organization is to improve the welfare of people around the world.
- In the first paragraph of the Marrakesh Agreement, Ministers of all founding members of the WTO salute the historic achievement they have made, which they believe will strengthen the world economy and lead to more trade, investment, employment and income growth throughout the world. We certainly hope that our Ministers could proudly say the same at the conclusion of MC13.
- Our founding fathers, however wise they were, could not have possibly foreseen all the challenges that the multilateral trading system will have to face today, in particular the modern-day challenges of digital economy, environmental sustainability, gender and inclusivity. If we were to truly uphold the mission of this organization, the WTO should be responsive to the ever-changing environments of the time.

- We recognise the complementary relationship between investment and trade. Investment drives economic growth, fosters transfer of technology, expands and diversifies production capacity, as well as promotes sustainable development. There is clear willingness among many economies to facilitate foreign direct investment by making their regulatory regimes more transparent and streamlined.
- Incorporation of plurilateral agreements in the legal framework of WTO is in the DNA of this organization. HKC firmly believes that JSIs, including the IFD Agreement, which start with plurilateral negotiations amongst like-minded pioneers and conclude with an open offer to all Members willing to accept the outcome, are making positive contribution to the multilateral trading system by reinvigorating the WTO's rules-making function.
- They strengthen the multilateral trading system by ensuring our rules could adapt to the evolving landscape of global trade and respond to aspirations of the people that we serve.
- HKC believes the IFD Agreement would be a valuable addition to the WTO rulebook. We call on Members to consider joining this initiative.
- Thank you.

Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in Geneva
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