

General Council Meeting
(21-22 March 2024)

Hong Kong, China's Statement

Item 2.1 – Follow-up to Outcomes of Ministerial Conferences – Abu Dhabi (MC13)

- First, I would like to join other members in thanking and congratulating the United Arab Emirates for hosting the MC13. Also worthy of commendation are of course the DG, the GC Chair, the Chairs of all the negotiating groups and special sessions, and also the Facilitators – not only for your work at the MC, but also in the months leading to it. Every one of us had worked very hard in that week, and had been on a roller coaster of emotions in the same week.
- But looking at the outcome, the very modest outcome that we talked about today, we cannot pride ourselves on our effectiveness or efficiency. Clearly, something is wrong. Therefore, it is very pertinent to talk about the conduct of MC so that we can do better next time.
- However, the problem does not really lie in the conduct of an MC. What needs to be changed has to start here and now because, as we often said, we should not leave things till the MC. We should break that habit or the mindset that things will only happen in the last minute at an MC – and that last minute will get extended and extended and extended.
- There are more fundamental problems that we all know. We are disappointed but we are not discouraged. In the morning, one respected member mentioned that small and vulnerable economies could not afford the demise of the rules-based multilateral trading system. HKC certainly agrees that the MTS is very important and very valuable to small economies like us. However, I think it is wrong in saying that it is only important for small and vulnerable economies, for it is important for the whole world. If this system does not work, we all suffer. The dire consequences are really horrible, so much so that I would not want to mention it.
- I do not think that we have a problem with the negotiating functions, because we negotiated on both the multilateral track and the plurilateral track. Yet even when we have the outcome – commercially meaningful outcome – on

the plate, waiting for incorporation into the WTO rulebook, the process of legal incorporation took a long time. Sometimes, we do not even see the end of that game. If we are to inject impetus into this organisation, the very pertinent question will be the incorporation of plurilateral outcomes into the WTO rulebook. This is one of the most important questions that we need to tackle.

Item 8 – Incorporation of the Investment Facilitation for Development Agreement into Annex 4 of the WTO Agreement

- First, I would like to thank Ambassador Boza for the briefing at the very beginning which laid out the status quo of the IFD Agreement and our request for its incorporation into the WTO rulebook.
- I also have to express my disappointment that we didn't even get the chance for our ministers to consider the request at Abu Dhabi. And now, the same headwinds we experience here.
- I join the EU to ask for a dedicated discussion or a dedicated process and the guidance from the GC chair as to how we can tackle the issue, so that the incorporation can move forward. The request – the formal request – is already there as a GC paper.
- Just now, I have heard some comments, which have been played several times. I would like to take this opportunity to start that consultation - to share our side of the views.
- First, I must say investment is not foreign to the WTO. It is wrong to say that investment agreements have no place in this organization. We have been talking about the 30th anniversary of the WTO. So let's look at the Marrakesh Declaration. In the very first paragraph, it says: "Ministers salute the historic achievement represented by the conclusion of the Round, which they believe will strengthen the world economy and lead to more trade, investment, employment and income growth throughout the world."
- This is the vision and mission of the WTO: this is what we are here for. The IFD Agreement is exactly something to facilitate investment and promote economic growth for development of all. I really have difficulty understanding why it is not the central topic that needs to be discussed here.

If this is not the place, I have to ask: which other international organisation will be better placed to discuss this very issue?

- Then, the process. We are following the exact process of Article X.9 of the Marrakesh Agreement. It is a legal pathway set out for the incorporation of plurilateral negotiation outcomes. Of course plurilateral negotiation is plurilateral, meaning not everyone is interested in its content or subject. That is why it is not multilateral with each and every member. But there is a significant number of members who have worked very hard to achieve what we have today, and we are asking for a formal process for its legal incorporation. We are ready to consult. We are ready to discuss. But we cannot agree that this is something foreign to the WTO. This is what the WTO should tackle.

Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in Geneva
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