

General Council Meeting (22-23 November 2021)

Hong Kong, China's Statement

Item 8: Work Programme on Electronic Commerce

A. Report by the Chair

B. Communication from Australia; Canada; Chile; Colombia; Costa Rica; Ecuador; El Salvador; Georgia; Guatemala; Hong Kong, China; Iceland; Korea, Republic of; Mexico; New Zealand; Norway; Peru; Singapore; Switzerland; Separate Customs Territory of Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen and Matsu; Thailand; Ukraine; United Kingdom and Uruguay

C. The Moratorium on Customs Duties on Electronic Transmissions: Need for Clarity on Its Scope and Impact – Communication from India and South Africa

- Thank you, Chair.
- First of all, I would like to welcome Mr Timur Suleimenov of Kazakhstan, the MC12 Chair, for joining us today. I would also like to join other colleagues in extending a warm welcome to those ambassadors who have just arrived and bidding farewell to those who are leaving Geneva, especially to Ambassador David Walker for all his contributions to the work of WTO in his various capacities over the years. I wish David all the best in his future endeavours.
- Turning to the current agenda item 8, Part B, I would like to echo the statement made by Switzerland on behalf of the co-sponsors of communication WT/GC/W/831/Rev.4 and express Hong Kong, China's strong support to submitting the draft decision for adoption at MC12.
- Hong Kong, China all along believes that the moratorium on customs duties on electronic transmissions has contributed to providing the necessary certainty and predictability for the global digital economy to thrive in the past 20 years, and that the moratorium should be made permanent. But we also understand that some Members are not ready to do so at this moment, so we agree that it is a pragmatic way forward to extend the moratorium until MC13 while Members continue their discussions after MC12 under the Work Programme.

- Unfortunately, despite the GC Chair's efforts to facilitate the discussions in the past few weeks, views are still divergent. We strongly believe that it is of utmost importance that the moratorium be extended until at least MC13, and that letting the moratorium expire after MC12 would send a wrong signal to all stakeholders at a time when many businesses, especially those operated by MSMEs, start-ups and disadvantaged groups, are relying on digital platforms and tools to overcome various difficulties brought about by the pandemic.
- As such, we do not believe that it is appropriate or meaningful to negotiate on a text without reference to the future of the moratorium, and Hong Kong, China is unable to support the draft decision contained in the communication from India (WT/GC/838).
- Hong Kong, China urges all Members to be pragmatic and we are open-minded to the Chair's suggestion on the way forward, including submitting both texts to our Ministers for consideration at MC12.
- Thank you very much.

Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in Geneva
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