

General Council Meeting on 1, 2 & 4 March 2021

Statement by Hong Kong, China

Item 4: Twelfth Session of the Ministerial Conference – Date and Venue

- Thank you, Chair.
- First of all, I would like to join other colleagues in extending a warm welcome to our new Director-General Dr Ngozi and to all permanent representatives who are newly on board. I look forward to working closely with them under the leadership of our new DG.
- I would also like to bid farewell to the UK Ambassador who is leaving Geneva and would wish Julian every success in his future endeavours.
- Coming back to the timing and venue of MC12, we are glad that there are converging views among Members on this matter, and Hong Kong, China is pleased to be part of the consensus.
- We would also like to express our appreciation of Kazakhstan's continued commitment and flexibility, and the GC Chair's efforts in consulting with Members during the past year to work out a pragmatic way forward in the light of the uncertainties and challenges brought by the pandemic.
- Thank you very much.

Item 10: Introduction of a Paper on “Legal Status of Joint Statement Initiatives and Their Negotiated Outcomes” – Request From India and South Africa (WT/GC/W/819)

- Thank you, Chair.
- Hong Kong, China would like to thank India and South Africa for their communication, setting out their views on the legal status of three Joint Statement Initiatives, namely Electronic Commerce, Services Domestic Regulation and Investment Facilitation for Development.
- Hong Kong, China is a strong supporter and active participant in all these three Joint Initiatives, and we share their common goal to modernise and strengthen the multilateral trading system on issues of increasing relevance to the global trading system. The need for more transparent and predictable trade rules is particularly pressing in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic, and we believe that the work on these Joint Initiatives is contributing to reinvigorating the efforts of the WTO in making new rules that respond to the aspirations of consumers and business communities across the globe.
- These Joint Initiatives build upon the extensive work of existing WTO bodies and programmes, such as the Working Party on Domestic Regulation and the Work Programme on Electronic Commerce, without affecting their multilateral mandates or ongoing work.
- Without prejudging the respective legal formats of the outcome in these Joint Initiatives, which are still under discussion, participants of the Joint Initiatives acknowledge that the outcome should be incorporated into the WTO framework in accordance with WTO rules and procedures.
- As the common goal of these Joint Initiatives is to deliver multilateral outcome with participation of as many Members as possible, participants are committed to keeping their work Member-driven, transparent, inclusive and open to all WTO Members.
- Participants are also providing constructive inputs to ensure that the development angle is central in the discussions under all three Joint Initiatives, with a view to facilitating the participation of Members at different levels of development through technical assistance, capacity building and transitional arrangements.

- Hong Kong, China would encourage more Members to join the meetings of these Joint Initiatives, which are open to all Members, and we look forward to engaging with them constructively.
- Thank you very much.

Item 11: Trade and Health: COVID-19 and Beyond – Update from Canada on Behalf of the Co-sponsors of WT/GC/223

- Thank you, Chair.
- Hong Kong, China would like to thank Canada and other co-sponsors of the communication for the updates on the Trade and Health Initiative. We would reiterate our support for the proponents' efforts, which seek to enhance the capacity of the international trading system to respond to public health emergencies and help improve the resilience of global supply chains.
- We welcome the draft General Council declaration circulated by the proponents at document JOB/GC/251. We are studying the draft and look forward to engaging further with the co-sponsors on it.
- Thank you.

Item 12: Review of the Exemption Provided under Paragraph 3 of the GATT 1994 (WT/L/1108)

- Thank you, Chair.
- Hong Kong, China thanks the United States for the notification submitted pursuant to paragraph 3(c) of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which kicks off the 12th review of the Jones Act.
- Our view remains that this exemption, which has been in place since the establishment of the WTO, is a major derogation from the WTO's fundamental principle of national treatment.
- Recognising the crucial role of maritime transport in the logistics trade, we are also concerned that the continued exemption would hold the United States back from liberalising its maritime transport services sector.
- We urge the United States to critically consider whether the conditions that created the need for the exemption in question still prevail. Hong Kong, China looks forward to engaging with the United States constructively and achieving a positive outcome in this review.
- Thank you.

Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in Geneva
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