

Commonwealth Statement on the Multilateral Trading System

Marlborough House, London
10 October 2019

1. Commonwealth Trade Ministers were particularly concerned about the risks of protectionism and unilateralism to the global economy and underlined the importance of resisting all forms of protectionism including the proliferation of WTO inconsistent measures that threatens the rules based trading system. They reaffirmed their commitment to free trade in a transparent, inclusive, fair, and open rules-based multilateral trading system with the WTO as its core institution, which takes into account concerns of developing countries and the special circumstances of the developing and the least developed countries and small and vulnerable economies, including Small Island Developing States (SIDS).
2. Ministers noted the efforts that are being undertaken to reform and modernise the WTO, recognising the importance of strengthening and reforming the organisation to improve its functioning so as to promote inclusive and sustainable growth and development. Ministers urged that any reform in the WTO should take into account the views of all members. Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to work constructively together and with other WTO Members on the necessary reform of the organisation with a sense of urgency, including in the lead up to the 12th WTO Ministerial Conference.
3. Ministers noted with concern the imminent threat to the dispute settlement mechanism, a cornerstone of the multilateral rules-based trading system, and agreed that urgent action is necessary to ensure its full functioning. Ministers therefore urged WTO Members to resolve the impasse regarding appointments to the Appellate Body before 11 December 2019.
4. Ministers reiterated their support for finding solutions to the remaining Doha Development Round issues, and recognised the need to address current and future challenges in international trade, including by updating WTO rules, in the interests of all its members. Ministers further recognized the need to enhance developing countries' capacity to participate in and benefit from new forms of trade.
5. Ministers acknowledged the opportunities for growth and development for trade created through e-commerce as well as the challenges posed. Ministers further recognized the need for closing the digital divide amongst Commonwealth and other WTO members.

6. Ministers reaffirmed the importance of the Work Programme on e-commerce at the WTO and noted the ongoing discussion under the Joint Statement Initiative on electronic commerce by some members.
7. They recognized the role the WTO can play in contributing towards achievement of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, and pledged to support conclusion of an agreement on comprehensive and effective disciplines that prohibit certain forms of fisheries subsidies that contribute to overcapacity and overfishing, and eliminate subsidies that contribute to IUU-fishing by the end of 2019. Ministers underscored the importance of the fisheries sector to many Commonwealth members. Furthermore, they recognised that appropriate and effective special and differential treatment for developing country members, in particular for SVEs including SIDS, and least-developed countries should be an integral part of the WTO fisheries subsidies negotiations. Ministers recalled SDG 14.6 and the Decision of Ministers at the 11th Ministerial Conference of the WTO in Buenos Aires in December 2017.
8. Ministers also welcomed ratification of the Trade Facilitation Agreement that has taken place since CHOGM 2018, by Uganda and Cameroon, and encouraged all remaining Commonwealth WTO members to ratify and work towards timely implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement in accordance with their commitments and to consider providing programmes of capacity building and other targeted interventions in developing countries, as agreed by Heads of Government.
9. Ministers expressed deep concern about the impact of climate change on all members, which significantly and gravely impact their economies and societies. Ministers recognised that SVEs including SIDS are perpetually vulnerable to the devastating effects of natural disasters on livelihoods and trading infrastructure. Ministers called on the Commonwealth members, members of the WTO and the international community to support trade measures that help to alleviate these vulnerabilities and challenges and enable reconstruction and improve the resilience of their economies.
10. They welcomed initiatives to strengthen the Commonwealth Small States Office in Geneva through the provision of additional resources and the sharing of technical expertise that enables small and developing states to participate effectively in the multilateral trading system and benefit from trade-related economic growth including through the participation of capital based delegates.