

Built on Historic Success

WTO members should build on the recent Nairobi meeting to tackle the urgent challenges facing the WTO in 2016

In his speech at the University of the West Indies in Jamaica on 18 January Azevêdo said WTO members should build on the historic success of the recent Nairobi to tackle the urgent challenges facing the WTO in 2016, including trade negotiations. This is what he said...

Let me explain in a bit more detail what was delivered in Nairobi. The Nairobi Package contained a number of important decisions—including a decision on export competition. This is truly historic. It is the most important reform in international trade rules on agriculture since the creation of the WTO. The elimination of agricultural export subsidies is particularly significant in improving the global trading environment... For many years global trade negotiations yielded few results. But, as you can see, we are changing all that. The WTO has delivered a huge amount over the last few years. We are getting into the habits of success. The WTO's 162 members monitor each other's practices and regulations against those rules in order to improve transparency and avoid protectionism. In Nairobi ministers formally acknowledged their differences about our future work. This was a very significant moment. But, despite those differences, there is some convergence. For example, there is a clear openness to advance negotiations on the remaining Doha issues, and to keep development at the centre of our work. These issues include domestic support and market access for agricultural goods, market access for industrial goods, services, fisheries subsidies, and a number of other areas. So clearly these are important issues, which members want to address through negotiations. The question, given the differences I have mentioned, is how?

At the same time, some members want to explore the possibility of discussing and eventually negotiating on other issues. Certainly, all members believe that the WTO can do more — and that we can do it at a faster pace. So the challenge before us is very significant. It is not limited only to the question of what happens to the Doha issues, it is about the negotiating function of the WTO. It is about what members want for the future of the Organization as a standard and rule-setting body. It has wide systemic implications for trade multilateralism, and for multilateralism at large. And the challenge is urgent.

The world won't wait for the WTO. Other trade deals will keep advancing. The WTO cannot stop delivering. The wider the gap between regional and multilateral disciplines, the worse the trade environment becomes for everyone, particularly businesses, small countries and all those not involved in major regional negotiations. But the outlook is not bleak. I said at the outset that 2016 was full of promise. I truly believe that—because, while we face real challenges, there are also real opportunities before us. The conversation that is already getting underway in Geneva will determine the future direction of global trade negotiations—and the future direction of the WTO. It is an opportunity to find solutions that have long eluded us.

It is an opportunity to ensure that trade delivers more—and that it supports growth and development for all.

So I trust members will rise to this challenge — and seize this opportunity. I have no doubt that Jamaica will play an active and central role in that debate.

Thank you.



*This is excerpted from **Roberto Azevêdo's** speech at the University of West Indies in Jamaica, on 18 January 2016, available at: www.wto.org/english/news_e/spra_e/spra109_e.htm*