

International Trade Secretary's MC12 Plenary Session Speech

It is a privilege to join the WTO's twelfth Ministerial Conference.

Many thanks must go to the Director General, Dr Ngozi, the General Council Chair, Ambassador Chambovey and the WTO Secretariat, for all their efforts to support this event.

This, the largest gathering of ministers in five years, comes at a pivotal time for the WTO and indeed, the global community.

Putin's brutal war has unleashed devastation and disruption on a world already burdened with Covid-19 and facing the omnipresent threat of climate change.

At such a critical and fragile time, we must defend the values that bind us together.

Values that mean we embrace trade's transformative power, uphold the Rules Based International System and turn our backs on division.

Now, as we begin the UK's first WTO ministerial conference as an independent trading nation, I want to set out the three principles that will guide our trade policy today and shape our vision for tomorrow:

First, we will always adhere to the concepts on which the World Trade Organisation was founded – trade that is open and free and brings prosperity to the world.

For the past 27 years, these concepts have allowed us to find solutions to the biggest questions facing us all.

Today, we must stay committed to these fundamental ideas and use them to address some of the world's most significant challenges.

Right now, food security is among the pressing.

Putin's insatiable appetite for power, threatens to leave the world's poorest famished.

I am glad that the UK-led Joint Statement on Open and Predictable Trade in Agriculture and Food Products, has been endorsed by over 50 other members – each committing to keep markets open and ensuring food is available to all.

At this Ministerial, I want us to work together to develop a more sustainable, efficient and resilient global food system for the long-term.

Climate change is another global challenge. The UK believes trade can help combat this threat, while simultaneously boosting economic growth.

As a green trade pioneer, the UK recently set out plans to go further and faster in this area.

Now, I want to work with my fellow trade ministers to put the WTO at the epicentre of finding solutions to the environmental issues that will define our future.

A significant step forward, would be a positive outcome to our negotiations on fisheries subsidies.

Success here would mean we achieve the first WTO multilateral agreement focused on sustainability.

The second principle that will guide the UK's actions; is the need to fight for fairness.

The UK wholeheartedly believes in the power of trade to allow countries to expand their economies.

So, we will support countries to increase exports, build stronger supply chains and tackle market distorting practices.

Every nation should shoulder its responsibility because fairness cuts both ways.

We must also support each other in times of need. Ukraine's struggle must be our shared struggle.

With our allies, the UK will continue do everything in our power to support Ukraine's right to exist as a democratic nation, including helping it rebuild in peace.

The day will surely come when ruined buildings are turned into construction sites and weapons are exchanged for laptops as Ukraine's services sector recovers and flourishes.

The UK therefore welcomes those delegates who want to join us in supporting Ukraine's trading present and future.

Our third principle is the need to make sure global trade rules truly address people's and businesses' modern-day issues.

All of us agree for the need for WTO modernisation. We must use this ministerial to recommit to progress in this area.

In addition, trade rules created in the pre internet age need to move with the times.

One of our key goals will be keep down the costs for online trade by calling for a renewal of the e-Commerce moratorium at this Ministerial. Businesses will never forgive us if we fail at this task.

We must also go further both by accelerating progress on the joint initiative

on e-commerce and by taking a reinvigorated approach to services and digital trade through the WTO, just as the UK has done through its Free Trade Agreements.

The pandemic has also demonstrated why we need a substantive trade and health package. Again, this is something, the UK will press for at this Ministerial.

My team and I look forward to many constructive discussions with our fellow delegates over the next days.

There may be some difficult conversations ahead but we should focus on all we share, rather than what sets us apart.

Our agreements reached here, on Lake Geneva's shores, will ensure that trade better serves our citizens and the world. Let us seize this opportunity with both hands.