

Liam Fox pledges half his team will be women if he is the WTO DG

Dr Liam Fox has pledged that women will make up at least half of his senior leadership team if he is appointed the next Director General of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

The UK has nominated former International Trade Secretary Dr Fox to be a candidate to replace current Director General Roberto Azevedo who stepped down this month after seven years.

Dr Fox, the only elected politician in the running for the role, believes changes need to be made to attract more women into senior trade roles at the WTO. He states:

- Women's economic empowerment through trade can only continue with widespread commitment to advancing the WTO and rules-based trading systems
- There is a need for the WTO to embrace the 'talents, innovation and creativity' of women to ensure it can lift another one billion people out of poverty
- Thirty years of progress is under threat from rising levels of unilateral actions and protectionism and those bearing the economic impact will disproportionately be women

Dr Fox believes securing the input of women at a senior level at the WTO will help reduce the many barriers women face in accessing trading opportunities.

He said:

As someone who trained and practised as a medical doctor I was used to half, and sometimes more, of my colleagues being female. But, despite real progress being made, women continue to face disproportionate barriers in accessing trading opportunities and markets due to discriminatory attitudes, poor conditions and harassment as well as unequal access to inputs such as credit and land.

And, as we look around us at the rising levels of unilateral actions and protectionism, we know that the remarkable achievement of the last three decades is under threat and that those bearing the brunt will be women.

Dr Fox believes the WTO and rules-based trading systems have created opportunities for women in both developed and developing countries which will be key to helping the global economy recover from the effects of the coronavirus pandemic.

In 2016, McKinsey estimated that creating more opportunities for women to work, including in export-led sectors, could add \$12 trillion to the global economy by 2025.

Dr Fox said:

What could be more counterproductive than failing to utilize the talents, innovation and creativity of half the planet's population? Women's economic empowerment through trade can and has played a key role in creating political stability and so the conditions for wider economic progress. This matters to all of us, wherever we are.

Currently, neither the Director General nor any of the four Deputy Director Generals at the WTO are female. The latest diversity breakdown of the WTO secretariat shows that of the 24 staff members in the most senior grades, only five were female.

Dr Fox said:

To attract more women into the architecture of trade, we need to make changes at all levels.

We need more input for women, by women if the WTO is to play its part in taking another one billion people out of extreme poverty. That is why, if I am successful in my candidacy, women will account for at least half of my senior leadership team.