

Speech by SCED at APEC MRT Meeting discussion session on supporting multilateral trading system (English only)

Following is the speech by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Algernon Yau, at the discussion session entitled "Supporting the Multilateral Trading System" at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Ministers Responsible for Trade (MRT) Meeting in Detroit, the United States, today (May 25, Detroit time):

Good afternoon, Chair and fellow colleagues. Allow me to start by expressing my gratitude to the United States (US) for arranging the meeting with a highly relevant agenda.

The World Trade Organization (WTO), the cornerstone of the multilateral trading system, is facing challenges that are unmatched in its relatively short history. For this session, Hong Kong, China (HKC) would like to make two suggestions.

First and foremost, it is of dire importance to restore a fully functional WTO dispute settlement system. In this regard, we welcome the US' efforts in shepherding the informal process in discussing the reform of the dispute settlement system. With the informal process reaching its second stage, it is critical that APEC member economies continue to work constructively and expeditiously with all other WTO members in order to meet the mandate of the 12th Ministerial Conference (MC12) in restoring, by 2024, a fully and well-functioning dispute settlement system accessible to all members.

Second, we need to demonstrate that the WTO is working for the benefits of our people. We cannot emphasise enough the importance of bringing early into force WTO-negotiated outcomes. HKC is making active preparations to accept the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies in the third quarter of this year. Early ratification of the Agreement by fellow APEC member economies will clearly demonstrate our relevance and resolve in delivering tangible benefits.

HKC also looks forward to the early implementation of the outcomes of various Joint Statement Initiatives (JSIs). HKC recognises the key role of investment in post-pandemic growth and recovery of the global economy, and is strongly committed to facilitating investment from various dimensions, including our active participation in the JSI on Investment Facilitation for Development (IFD). Towards the end of last year, we witnessed one of the most important milestones since negotiation when the draft IFD Agreement was presented at the WTO. I urge all APEC member economies to play our active

part in bringing this initiative to fruition.

I also encourage APEC member economies to join the JSI on E-commerce and fellow participants of the JSI to expedite our work, with a view to achieving substantive conclusion within this year. Of equal importance is the need to preserve an enabling, tariff-free environment for e-commerce. HKC all along supports making permanent the WTO moratorium on customs duties on electronic transmissions, and I call on APEC member economies to work together at the WTO to answer the calls of the global business community and extend the moratorium.

Fellow colleagues, just a year ago, we proved at the MC12 that we were able to set aside differences and collectively address problems of the global commons. In the face of growing fragmentation, the world is looking upon us to step up international co-operation and bring about effective multilateral responses for equitable growth, job creation and sustainable development. HKC is committed as ever to working alongside all APEC member economies to build as much convergence towards meaningful results at the 13th Ministerial Conference, and to take forward reforms to ensure the WTO continues to be relevant and effective to take on the challenges of today and tomorrow.

Thank you Chair.