

UK statement on the WTO Joint Initiative on Services Domestic Regulation

Thank you Frances, good morning to you and colleagues, and thank you for convening today's meeting.

First of all, I would like to congratulate Jaime and colleagues for the progress that has already been made in this Initiative. We have got very close to agreement.

COVID-19 has been a challenge for the WTO, as it has been for other multilateral institutions. But COVID-19 makes it even more urgent to make progress on this initiative, and its goal of liberalising global Services trade. Success here will show the relevance of the WTO, and how it can help the world overcome the economic crisis we are now going through. It will also reinforce an open, and predictable global trading system, something that come under further threat during this COVID-19 crisis.

In response to your questions:

The UK priority is that the Initiative should deliver a timely and meaningful outcome, with as much ambition as possible. We are therefore keen to consolidate progress on outstanding issues by the end of this year, and reach a finalised text well before a rescheduled MC12. What a positive message it would send if we could announce an agreement at the special General Council later this year.

To that end, we support finding ways of keeping up the momentum, and getting back to open and fully inclusive negotiations as soon as possible. We look forward to the meeting on the 16th. In addition, now that the Swiss authorities are permitting physical meetings, of up to 300 people, from tomorrow, we think it should be possible for the WTO to support resuming physical meetings soon in line with Swiss health guidance. We think the Initiative should seek to take advantage of these developments, if colleagues here are ready and agree to this step, and hold hybrid physical meetings before the summer.

The United Kingdom will continue to do all it can do ensure that this Initiative reaches a successful conclusion.

Thank you Frances.