

UK statement to Ottawa Group

Thank you Minister Ng for welcoming the UK to the Ottawa Group. I am delighted to be attending our first of these meetings today. Thank you also to Dr. Okonjo-Iweala for your encouraging and challenging remarks.

The WTO, the global trading system, and free and fair trade remains at the heart of our shared prosperity. However, the WTO is under strain and the rules of global trade need to be reformed: it is vital that we work together to ensure that the twelfth WTO Ministerial Conference (MC12) secures the real change we all want to see. It is important for us all to build back better by supporting our ongoing recovery and future prosperity through free and fair trade.

We need to face up to the fact that the WTO has failed to keep pace with the opportunities and challenges of 21st century trade, and it is crucial we reform the WTO. That is why the UK is using its G7 Presidency this year to place WTO reform at the heart of our discussions.

We must also show that the WTO can deliver the results our people expect. At MC12 we must conclude the multilateral fisheries negotiation and make substantial progress in the Joint Initiatives. Covid has demonstrated the importance of digital trade and making substantial progress on e-commerce should be a high priority for us.

Our citizens can't believe in free trade if it is not fair. We need to tackle the gaps in the WTO rulebook so we can stamp out pernicious trade practices such as unfair subsidies which give trade a bad name.

We should explore how we can take forward the work of the EU-US-Japan trilateral on trade distortive practices, bringing it to a wider range of WTO members to ensure we can have real impact as we move towards MC12. We also need to acknowledge the forward-looking risk of carbon leakage, its implications for the global trading system, and how best to tackle it together.

We need to get the WTO dispute resolution system fully working again, and it is very important that the 'big' players do not get to set the rules. It is critical that the WTO dispute settlement is binding, enforceable and impartial.

We should recognise the concerns raised by parties regarding the Appellate Body, but we must also have a roadmap agreed for how the WTO can resolve the current impasse. The UK will use the G7 Presidency to seek common ground on this issue.

Turning to Covid, we have seen the failings of our global trade system exploited during the pandemic by nations raising barriers to trade, which the UK completely rejects. The need to keep free trade flowing has never been greater.

We must avoid beggar thy neighbour policies – this is a global challenge we must work together to overcome. The UK is committed to this agenda. At the height of the Covid crisis, we championed transparency on trade restrictive measures and encouraged the withdrawal of such restrictions at the G20 and WTO.

The UK noted the Ottawa Group's Covid-19 Action Plan with interest in June. We are supportive of its approach and wish to continue working with the group as it evolves. It will be important that Ottawa Group members follow the principles set out, and lead by example.

This is crucial year for the global trading system. We know the challenges and what we need to do. The UK looks forward to working closely with all of you to ensure we collectively meet that challenge.