

World Trade Organization General Council, July 2021: UK statements

Agenda Item 2: Implementation of the Bali, Nairobi and Buenos Aires Outcomes

Proposals for a new UK Developing Countries Trading Scheme will replace GSP and we have invited colleagues' views on the scheme. This is due to come into effect next year. It will be more sustainable, pro-growth and simpler. We are looking to be best of class. Live consultations are underway until 12th September and we welcome members' feedback.

Agenda Item 4: TRIPS Council Matters

I welcome the factual, objective and accurate report by the TRIPS Council Chair. We all recognised the scale of the challenge as the pandemic continued to rage in so much of the world and paid tribute to the eloquent testimony to its human effects by South Africa and others. We all agreed that our objective should be – to use the phraseology the G7 at Carbis Bay – to vaccinate the world. The question was how.

Sitting on the UK's Vaccine Taskforce board last year, we faced many challenges in developing and deploying vaccines, including potential bottlenecks and the resilience of our supply chains. IP was not the problem, nor is it. In fact, it was the IP regime that has enabled the extraordinary scientific advances of the last year, including the development of an unexpected number of safe and effective vaccines.

Scaling up the production and delivery of vaccines has been at the heart of our G7 Presidency, including the commitment to share a billion doses within the next year and our national financial contribution to COVAX of £548m (three quarters of billion dollars) as well as our forthcoming sharing of doses through COVAX.

We would continue to encourage voluntary licensing and technology transfer, support COVAX and look to identify solutions to production bottlenecks and weaknesses in the supply chain. And in that respect we very much welcomed efforts to bolster public/private and international collaboration in this area, such as the WTO-WHO Symposium last week, and also the new World Bank/COVAX financing mechanism.

Agenda Item 5 & 6: Work Programme on Electronic Commerce – Report by the Chair and Work Programme on Electronic Commerce and Moratorium on Imposing Customs Duties on Electronic Transmissions

Digitalisation is one of the great features of the modern age. It has been hastened by the pandemic. Digitalisation is a good thing for developing and developed countries alike. Many examples have been cited of countries who have been helped to integrate into the global economy and pull themselves out of poverty through digitalisation. We are a very strong supporter of the work

programme on e-commerce and recognise the importance of inclusive digital trade. We welcome recent structured discussions held by the GC chair and support constructive, open and inclusive discussions. Let me echo the comments of Australia and EU. It would be inconceivable to do anything other than extend or render permanent the Moratorium. To do otherwise would be bizarre.

Agenda Item 7 & 8: Preparations for the Twelfth Session of the Ministerial Conference and Contributions to the Multilateral Process on the WTO Response to the Pandemic

This is an area where Ministers will want a substantive outcome, as we will still be in the midst of the pandemic when they meet at MC12. Let me pay tribute to Ambassador Walker for the consultations and hard work. Let me also pay tribute to the DG for collaboration with other international organisations and business. We need more of this collaboration in the months ahead. We are a cosponsor of TAHI and therefore encourage others to join up to it. We also welcome the EU and Chinese Taipei's proposals. As others have said, we need a holistic approach that focuses on practical solutions. That is what is so strong about the trade and health declaration proposal that delivers concrete actions to facilitate trade during the pandemic and beyond, allowing members to react with flexibility and agility to pressures. It is important that as we move forward, we reach an outcome for this Ministerial Conference, but also a programme of work that allows us to develop these proposals in the years ahead to ensure this organisation is prepared for future pandemics.

Agenda Item 13: G90 Declaration on Special and Differential Treatment – Communication from South Africa on behalf of the G90 (WT/GC/234)

My thanks to South Africa and G90 for their paper. We all agree that Special and Differential Treatment remains an important tool for supporting WTO members with genuine need – in particular for supporting Least Developed Countries in their integration into the multilateral trading system and enjoy benefits of this system. This should obviously continue. But, we all recognise that the current mechanism for awarding and claiming SDT requires reform. A more targeted approach based on specific and identified needs is required to ensure those Members with real need are supported during current and future negotiations. A granularity to which the EU just referred. Both at, and in the run-up to MC12, the United Kingdom would like to see concrete progress towards such a more balanced and targeted approach to SDT, and we look forward to engaging with further Members to seek common ground in the weeks ahead.

Agenda Item 14: Paper Titled “The Legal Status of ‘Joint Statement Initiatives’ and their Negotiated Outcomes” – Request from India and South Africa (WT/GC/W/819)

Thank you very much Mr Chairman. What strikes me is the importance of the Joint Initiatives to the credibility of the WTO. If we were to lose the JIs then we would be all the poorer. We support the comments made by the European Union and recall our statements in previous meetings. The UK is a strong

supporter of the Joint Initiatives, which have brought much needed energy and dynamism to the WTO. These plurilateral negotiations are enabling a significant proportion of the membership to make much needed progress on key areas, where new rules are urgently needed to demonstrate the Organization's credibility in the 21st century global economy, in a way that is open and inclusive.

Agenda Item 15: Proposed General Council Decision on Procedures to Enhance Transparency and Strengthen Notification Requirements Under WTO Agreements

As others have said, transparency lies right at the heart of this organisation and I would like to salute the United States for the leadership role they have made on this initiative and really welcome the new co-sponsors who have joined up to it. As our Canadian and US colleagues have said, we have made a real effort to try and listen to the comments of others before bringing this initiative to the General Council, in particular as was said, to consider the capacity constraints that some LDCs face. So I really would appeal to others across this organisation to join this initiative and we really look forward to taking it forward and put into practice. I think it can really aid us, as so many delegations have expressed in the last day or so. Increased transparency, as a means of increasing the trust, which we need to build within this organisation and I hope that this initiative can be a really constructive proposal to that end.

Agenda Item 16: Joint Communication on Systemic Issues

Thank you to the co-sponsors for bringing forward this joint communication. We are not a co-sponsor but there is much in this communication that we very much commend. We support efforts like this to affirm the rules based multilateral trading system and indeed the need for a reform of this organisation in order to support that. We particularly agree with the centrality of this organisation in the multilateral trading system as well as the importance of an open, predictable and transparent system to secure the sort of inclusive, sustainable, greener recovery that I think we all want to see after this pandemic. I also want to mention in this context, in the response to this pandemic, we have just announced today the delivery of the first 9 million promised 100 million doses to developing countries, those 9 million of AstraZeneca vaccines being delivered in the course of this week and next for a number of developing countries, most of them through the COVAX mechanism. As well as the existing negotiations and systemic discussions on reform, we would like to see further reform of the WTO rulebook to mitigate, amongst other things, the impact of market distorting practices in the global trading system, including the use of industrial subsidies. So, we look forward to working with Members across this organisation to progress this reform agenda, both up to, and beyond MC12. Thank you very much indeed.