

World Trade Organization General Council, October 2021: UK statements

TRIPS COUNCIL MATTERS

Thank you very much, first of all, to Ambassador Sørli for his status report of the work on the TRIPS Council. I think the report is factual, objective and accurately reflects the developments there. The truth is, as we know, despite our many discussions on these topics, members are still finding it difficult to move toward consensus on these issues. I think we all agree that we need a substantive Trade and Health outcome at MC12. One which promotes vaccine production and supports equitable vaccine distribution for all the reasons that other colleagues have stated.

Where we find ourselves rather at odds is on the most effective way to deliver those outcomes. For our own part, we believe that the Intellectual Property system has been a critical enabler of our response through this awful pandemic through the extraordinary success in developing the number of effective vaccines that we have today. And indeed, the therapeutics and diagnostics which we have seen great news on just in the last few days. We do know that production is rising to the levels that we all aspired to. Production reached 7.5 billion doses last month and we are still on course to get to 12 billion by the end of this year. With more manufacturing partnerships being signed, support for local production, and we really welcome for example the announcement just last month that Pfizer BioNtech signed a deal with Eurofarma in Brazil for COVID-19 vaccine production and scale up.

It's also a harsh reality, very eloquently expressed by colleagues around the room this morning, that far too many people are still not receiving the vaccines. There is clearly a problem with equitable access and distribution and practical issues too about the delivery of those vaccines. This is a multifaceted challenge and on the intellectual property side we are certainly willing to consider ways in which IP can be harnessed more effectively, particularly to promote production partnerships. We welcome pragmatic suggestions some members have made in this regard. Finding ways to promote voluntary licensing and tech transfer are clearly a vital part in this effort. But the solution of vaccine distribution and equity goes well beyond IP, we have discussed this in many fora here. It relies on identifying key bottlenecks that companies are facing in production, distribution and administration of vaccines across the whole product chain and acting to remove those bottlenecks that bite hardest on that supply chain. That includes action to constrain trade restrictive measures, and promote trade facilitation, issues that have been taken up in the Trade and Health initiative which colleagues have ready referred to this morning and which we continue to strongly support and would like to see reflected at MC12.

A solution on vaccine distribution and equity also requires proper support for COVAX. We have ourselves provided around three quarters of a billion US

Dollars to COVAX and are also sharing 100 million doses of vaccines from the UK. The UK is committed to a multifaceted and pragmatic response at MC12 and we will work hard, with colleagues to achieve that outcome.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE TWELFTH SESSION OF THE MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE

Thank you chair for your updates. I am speaking on behalf of Ambassador Manley who has competing commitments. I will only comment in detail on the MC12 outcome document. Before I do, I would like to express the UK's support for the statement by Canada on behalf of the TAHI cosponsors. Turning to the MC12 outcome document, I want to thank you for your efforts on moving forward these discussions and thank you for the draft language you have proposed and accompanying three questions that my colleagues in capital are currently considering. For now, I would just like to record three points. We think the outcome document needs to recognise the twin crises the world is facing right now: both the pandemic, and the climate crisis. This latter will be top of all our minds in late November coming hot on the heels of COP26 in Glasgow. As well as recording outcomes agreed at the conference, we should use the document to set a strong platform for our work post-MC12, not least on the critical question of WTO Reform. We should also seek to give guidance on the way forward on other issues important to our societies and businesses in the third decade of this 21st century. Including environment and climate change, gender, and services amongst others. While we should find consensus wherever we can, we should not be too afraid of constructive disagreements. If it helps us get an agreed document overall, we may need to accept recording the different views of members across certain issues. We look forward to continuing to engage in this process.

WORK PROGRAMME ON ELECTRONIC COMMERCE AND MORATORIUM ON IMPOSING CUSTOMS DUTIES ON ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSIONS

Thank you Chair, I'll be brief. The United Kingdom is a strong supporter of the Moratorium on imposing customs duties on electronic transmissions and supports the position that it should be made permanent. The increasing uncertainty on the moratorium being extended at MC12 has resulted in an uptick of concerns from stakeholders. We therefore call on members to productively engage in discussions on extending the moratorium at MC12. Thank you.

TRADE RELATED CHALLENGES OF THE LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES AND WAY FORWARD: A DRAFT FOR MC DECISION

The UK remains alive to the challenges Least Developed Countries face to their graduation efforts and remains committed to working with LDCs to ensure they have the tools necessary to integrate into the rules-based international trading system.

The UK believes that graduation from LDC status is a positive development and that further integration into the multilateral trading system through taking on increasing commitments helps developing countries improve their domestic

economies.

Like other members, we would therefore like to see more evidence of why the proposed blanket 12-year period of continued access to LDC provisions is necessary.

PROPOSED GENERAL COUNCIL DECISION ON PROCEDURES TO ENHANCE TRANSPARENCY AND IMPROVE COMPLIANCE WITH NOTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS UNDER WTO AGREEMENTS

Thank you Chair. We welcome this proposal being brought to the General Council again. While we're rightly dedicating much time in the lead up to MC12 on critical policy issues like fisheries subsidies, trade and health and agriculture, we would be remiss to overlook this opportunity to make a less noticed but highly significant contribution at the conference to improving the way our system works. These are a set of changes that would not only improve the way that we monitor each other's adherence to the principles we have commonly agreed, but also make it easier to update those rules in future, improving our common understanding of the landscape of global trade. This is, in other words, an idea whose time has come. With that in mind I am delighted to welcome the new cosponsors, as named by our colleague from the US. I hope members can recognise the way cosponsors have listened to and responded to feedback received during outreach on this proposal and can see that significant shifts have been made in recent versions of the proposal. We encourage members to review the latest text and cosponsors remain open to further discussions on this as we move toward MC12.

PAPER TITLED "THE LEGAL STATUS OF 'JOINT STATEMENT INITIATIVES' AND THEIR NEGOTIATED OUTCOMES" BY INDIA, SOUTH AFRICA AND NAMIBIA

Thank you Chair. The United Kingdom has intervened on this proposal at previous General Councils, setting out our strong support for the joint initiatives which have brought much needed energy and dynamism to the WTO. Chair, while it is perfectly fine to have a conversation about the legal status of our work on different issues at the WTO, and as our colleague from the EU said, this is an important conversation, such a conversation should not be divorced from the reality of the people we serve and why we are sent here to Geneva. Last week's Public Forum was a timely reminder of the fact that business and civil society expects us to make progress on the issues that matter to them in the third decade of the 21st century. We should therefore be actively engaged in working out together how we can enable that and not in blocking progress on it. That should be the teller of discussion on our initiatives and is how the UK will continue to engage in this area. Thank you.