

WTO General Council: UK statements

Item 4 – TRIPS Council Matters

Mr Chair.

Thank you, and my thanks too to my Norwegian colleague, the TRIPS Council Chair, for his report, and my thanks to the Director General for her leadership on this issue. And thanks also for the words of welcome to me and to the other WTO newbies, on our first appearance at the General Council.

This is a really important issue. All the more so when, as others have said already this morning, so many countries around the world find themselves still in the full front of this pandemic. Our thoughts and prayers are particularly with our Indian friends and allies at this moment.

It is clearly essential that we work together as an international community to find effective ways to ensure equitable, affordable and timely access to COVID-related technologies and supplies. As we say, all too often, no one is safe until we are all safe.

Since the last time we met here at the General Council we have, however, broken new ground in the fight against this pandemic, especially in approving and distributing vaccines to those most in need. We are proud as the UK, to be at the forefront of those efforts to protect people across the globe from the virus. We are a founding donor to the ACT Accelerator, and we have made one of the largest commitments to the COVAX Advance Market Commitment for low and middle-income countries, with commitments to those ACT-A partners of over \$1 billion [US dollars].

We have seen an unprecedented global response to this threat, which should allow COVAX to supply over 2 billion COVID-19 vaccine doses to all participants in the course of this year. And of course we are proud that a UK vaccine, developed by my own alma mater of Oxford University and produced by AstraZeneca, is at the heart of this response. Right now AstraZeneca has entered into more than a dozen collaborations in countries around the globe – for example in China, Mexico, Brazil, Russia, South Korea and India – to deliver billions of doses to people around the world.

Now is the time, Mr Chair, to ramp up global manufacturing. It is vital we keep trade flowing to ensure that issues such as skills and raw materials shortages don't hold us back. That's why we have been working to ensure that industry and the research institutes have the resources they need to identify and scale-up production of safe vaccines as quickly as possible, while they have taken on significant risks and investment themselves.

A balanced and effective intellectual property regime has proved invaluable in this crisis, as in others, in supporting innovation and supporting collaboration, as well as ensuring the results of that innovation, including safe and effective diagnostics, vaccines and therapeutics can reach those who

need them. The UK stands ready to engage in further evidence-based discussions and is committed to finding solutions to these issues. Meanwhile, we are delighted to see the WTO bringing together key stakeholders to look carefully at all the relevant trade, health and intellectual property elements so that we can support the development, production, and equitable access to these vaccines. We salute the role played by the Director General in this regard.

We remain committed as a country to work with our allies around the world in the fight against COVID. Just today, in London, we are hosting a meeting of G7 Foreign and Development Ministers, the first of such in-person meetings for over two years, to put this issue among others, on international agendas.

But governments, Mr Chairman, cannot do this on their own. Industry, manufacturers, and innovators have to look carefully about how they can do more as well. We want to see more partnerships that use voluntary licensing to ensure access to innovations – whether they be in vaccines, therapeutics or diagnostics – for those who need them. We are also committed to working with all parts of the innovation and the production chain, to ensure we have the right tools. This will require industry, developers and manufacturers alike, to collaborate in making available the information needed to engage in effective partnerships. This also requires delivering assistance to partners to allow them to deliver that at real scale, sufficient quality, and to a limited time-frame, for example by model agreements or trade agreements. The international community in turn needs to focus its effort on providing appropriate guidance rather than engaging in polarised discussions.

Chair, we welcome the positive steps that we have made in recent weeks and months towards vaccine equity, including on the collaborations that we need to deliver unprecedented numbers of innovative health products to those most in need. This vital work is far from over, and as a country the United Kingdom will continue to play its part in driving this work forward towards a successful conclusion.

Thank you very much.

Item 7 – Work Programme on Electronic Commerce and Moratorium on Imposing Customs Duties on Electronic Transmissions – Request from India

Thank you, Mr Chair.

The good news is that there is no prepared UK statement. If you want to look at what our position is, it is adequately contained in the minutes of many previous meetings. All I want to say is that we support the moratorium, we think it should be permanent, and our Australian colleague put it far more eloquently than I can.

End of statement, thank you very much.

Item 8 – Paper Titled “The Legal Status of ‘Joint Statement Initiatives’ and their Negotiated Outcomes” – Request from India and South Africa

Thank you, Mr Chairman.

Thank you very much for giving us the floor again. I have listened very carefully to my colleagues this morning. We have spoken in detail on the issue before and you can find our comments in the official minutes.

We continue to think – as my EU, Australian, Costa Rican and Russian colleagues have pointed out – that there is real value in these JSIs [Joint Statement Initiatives]. Indeed, we see these JSIs as shining examples of how Members of this organisation can come together to free up trade in some of those areas where business, I'm afraid, is getting ahead of what we have agreed here; and they can make real benefits to businesses and people.

And so we continue to believe that these offer real advantages to all of us, as we try and build back better from the current pandemic.

Thank you very much.

Item 9 – Trade and Health: COVID-19 and Beyond

Thank you Mr Chair.

And thank you to my Canadian colleague for the statement he delivered a few moments ago on behalf of the 46 co-sponsors of this initiative, now including the United Kingdom.

Mr Chairman, earlier this week at TNC [WTO Trade Negotiations Committee] I said that I find it pretty unimaginable that our Ministers would wish to come to MC12, in the midst of this awful pandemic, and not make a substantive statement on health issues. We do need to show that – as some of others have said – that the WTO can deliver results people expect on these sorts of issues.

We have joined this proposal because we believe it seeks to tackle the severe disruption we have seen to global trade, that has arisen from the use of export restrictions and other barriers for COVID critical products. And we believe that at this really critical moment in the fight against the COVID pandemic, Members of this organisation can help to ensure vital supplies, including vaccines, get to those who most need them: by keeping those medical supply chains open.

So, Mr Chair, I would really encourage other Members to join this proposal, to send a powerful political signal that together we are all playing our part in the fight against COVID – by keeping trade flowing. And in line with the principles of this initiative, we have for our own part already taken steps to implement the commitments regarding tariff liberalisation and our approach to export restrictions on COVID critical goods – which is something we did as soon as we could, in January of this year.

So, Mr Chairman, we really look forward to working with colleagues – both co-sponsors and others – on this proposal in the run-up to MC12 [WTO Ministerial Conference], so as to seek more resilient supply chains. Not just – I should say – as a defence against this current COVID pandemic, but also as an insurance policy; an insurance policy against future pandemics, and to show that by working together, we can and will build back better and stronger.

Thank you very much indeed.

Item 10 – Procedural Guidelines for WTO Councils and Committees Addressing Trade Concerns

Thank you, Chair, and many thanks to the co-sponsors.

The United Kingdom supports efforts to improve the functioning of this organisation's regular committees and councils. We continue to broadly support these proposals, which we think do provide a good balance between creating quality minimum standards, while offering scope for individual committees to take tailored approaches to the way they operate.

Mr Chair, of course it is also true that these proposed procedural improvements will not alone solve the problems that we see in WTO councils and committees. And Members themselves, in our view, need to continue to engage as constructively as possible in resolving the substantive concerns that are raised, and that means more listening, and more working to find convergence, as we discussed earlier this week at the TNC.

Thank you very much indeed.

Item 11 – Statement by Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Panama and Paraguay on Trade Restrictions that Block Equal Access to COVID-19 Vaccines

Thank you, Chair.

And thanks to Panama's Deputy Minister Cano, and other colleagues, who have spoken. This is a very interesting debate and, as many have said, nobody will be safe until we are all safe.

As my Australian colleague has said, this is a global crisis and really needs a global solution. Free and fair trade has never been more important than in our fight against COVID-19. Open supply chains help ensure people get the critical goods they need, such as vaccines.

The United Kingdom is proud to be fully engaged in the global response to the pandemic, whether it is through the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator or COVAX which, together, help to ensure developing countries can access COVID-19 vaccines.

Together, we can and we must meet the global demand by joining forces to ramp up our vaccine production. That is why we believe barriers to trade in vaccines are in nobody's interest.

The UK encourages Members to review and roll-back those measures still in place as soon as possible. And we should also step up and work collectively towards removing trade restrictive measures on medical goods, including COVID-19 vaccines. And Chair, as well as continuing cooperation with fellow governments on measures to tackle the pandemic like those referred to in my comments on the Trade and Health Initiative – we also call upon industry to engage here, as the DG has been doing in her meetings. Governments cannot do this on their own. We remain interested in hearing their reflections on what

can be done to help overcome these bottlenecks so that together we can get supply lines moving.

And Chair, like others, we have also noted the announcement made by the US Trade Representative on the TRIPS Waiver. So let me just briefly take the opportunity to say that we are committed to continuing our discussions with both the US, and other WTO Members, to find the swiftest and most effective way to facilitate the increased production and supply of COVID-19 vaccines.

To conclude, Chair, the UK recognises the importance of vaccines to building back better and stronger. That is why we look forward to continuing to work closely with all WTO Members to keep our trade in vaccines flowing.

Thank you.