

WTO General Council: UK statements

Item 8 – Work Programme on Electronic Commerce and Moratorium on Imposing Customs Duties on Electronic Transmissions – Request from India

Thank you Chair, and with thanks to India for its statement I'd like to make three points:

First, the United Kingdom is a strong supporter of the moratorium on imposing customs duties on electronic transmissions and we fully support making it permanent because the gains from trade and investment are so significant including for developing countries.

Second, the United Kingdom welcomes the continued engagement by Members on this important issue. Whilst there are clearly different views across the Membership on the moratorium, we consider it important that the Work Programme on E-Commerce continues to be the forum where these views are discussed and debated, although like others we see no need to make it a standing item on the General Council agenda.

Third, as COVID-19 continues to impact us all Digital Trade and Digital Platforms have been essential in mitigating the economic and other consequences of the pandemic, and will be critical to our economic recovery after the pandemic.

If the WTO is unable to agree rules on e-commerce that reality will change. It will just mean that the rules on e-commerce will get written elsewhere, as they have been for the last three decades, without the broad representation that the WTO provides. That is why we believe that the work being delivered through the JSI on e-commerce to deliver global rules on digital trade is important for both developing and developed countries, and we continue to actively support those discussions.

Thank you, Chair.

Item 9 – Call to Prevent Export Restrictions on Covid-19 Vaccines: Communication from Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Panama and Paraguay

Thank you, Chair, and thanks to Colombia and the other proponents for tabling this paper. This is an important debate.

We all have an interest in supporting supply chains, to enable businesses across the globe to get medical goods to those that need them. Open trade in vaccines is also an essential precondition if we are to ramp-up global vaccine production to meet global demand. Consequently, we believe trade restrictive barriers on vaccines are in nobody's interest.

The United Kingdom looks forward to continuing cooperation with all WTO

Members on how, together, we can facilitate the production of and trade in vaccines and other medical goods needed to effectively tackle this pandemic and respond to the challenge that our Director General set out yesterday, including by exploring the ideas set out by the European Union today.

Thank you, Chair.

Item 10 – Introduction of a Paper on ‘Legal Status of Joint Statement Initiatives and their Negotiated Outcomes’: Request from India and South Africa

Thank you, Chair.

I'd thank India and South Africa for their paper. However, the United Kingdom does not share the view that the work of the Joint Statement Initiatives is inconsistent with the rights and obligations of Members or the appropriate functions of the WTO.

These JSI discussions have brought much-needed energy and dynamism to the WTO, enabling a significant proportion of the Membership to make vital progress on areas where new rules and commitments are urgently needed to update the global trading system. The JSIs are some of the most important reforms undertaken at the WTO.

We would encourage participants of the JSIs to continue attracting wider interest and participation from across the Membership. This will ensure these negotiations are as inclusive as possible and pave the way for them to be adopted multilaterally in future and for the WTO to remain relevant.

Thank you, Chair.

Item 11 – Trade and Health: Covid-19 and Beyond: Update from Canada

Thank you, Chair, and many thanks to Canada for the update on the next steps on the Trade and Health Initiative and for the Ottawa Group's leadership on this issue.

This pandemic is a shared global challenge, and we have a shared opportunity to help tackle it for the benefit of citizens through action in this House.

As such, the UK has already committed to the operative commitments with regards to tariff liberalisation and approach to export restrictions as laid out in the text of the initiative.

So Chair, the United Kingdom looks forward to working together with the Members of the Ottawa Group as well as other Members across the WTO as this critical work evolves.

Thank you, Chair.