

WTO Trade Negotiations Committee (November 2021): UK Statement

Thank you for your inspiring and honest words this morning. Let us hope that your presence – as it did in Glasgow – will, along with Ambassador Peralta's now celebrated magic act, produce a rabbit out of the hat. Or perhaps some other creature since Jaime has already produced a rabbit. Because right now this isn't about a glass half full. It's far more worrying than that.

Let's start with the positives. They are few but they are important. And they are the JSIs. The domestic services regulation – which could cut 6 to 7% off the costs of the global services trade, which as you said, is so vital to global trade. And I particularly welcome the ground-breaking provisions on gender. Let me also welcome the Joint Ministerial declarations on Trade and Gender and MSMEs and encourage the greatest possible number of signatories from fellow members. And we are making good progress on e-commerce and investment facilitation – and by the way I can't imagine something more likely to expose this organisation to the ridicule of global business than the suggestion that we might not renew the e-commerce moratorium.

I wish that we were making similar progress multilaterally for all the reasons you cite. And let me pay tribute to the efforts of our colleagues leading and helping out on those negotiations. As others, we simply can't duck two of the biggest challenges of our time: our response to the pandemic and our response to the climate crisis. We have been and will continue to be realistic – but we are not going to give up on our conviction that this organisation can and must contribute to these issues of the global commons.

On trade and health, simply repeating pre-existing rules and pre-existing commitment doesn't cut the mustard. Nor does insisting on ripping up the IP framework that has enabled our response to the pandemic, rather than focusing on what will actually hasten the distribution of vaccines. On climate, days after the Glasgow Climate Pact, we simply cannot fail to recognise the role that this organisation needs to play in the transition to net zero/a greener global economy. Like you, I simply can't understand why we can't reach agreement on services language. And almost nobody would understand if we weren't able to sustain our oceans and the communities who depend on them after 20 years of negotiation.

Madame Chair. With apologies to my US colleagues, let this be the city that never sleeps. At least for the next week. My delegation, like so many others here, will be working over this weekend and the days ahead to demonstrate that this organisation still does matter, that we can strike deals that matter to our citizens and to our businesses, even where that means moving forward plurilaterally, rather than multilaterally, and that our ministers will return from Geneva with something more than some of the world's finest chocolate. You and the chair of the General Council have our support in that noble endeavour.