

WTO Trade Negotiations Committee: UK Statement

Director General, it is very good to be here. I congratulate you on your first TNC HoDs [Trade Negotiations Committee, Heads of Delegation] – it is mine too, and I look forward to meeting more of my colleagues in person in the days, and weeks, and months ahead.

DG, before I came to Geneva I spent quite a bit of time talking to, and listening to, British businesses, big and small, from across sectors, about what the WTO means for them. I found that many of them were a bit gloomy about the fact that the WTO hadn't done very much of late, for them. But equally, they were very keen to engage with the WTO, and hopeful that MC12 [12th Ministerial Conference] would actually show that the WTO was back in business, and backing business, and that we were rebuilding confidence in this institution. And while we work on the small print in these virtual rooms, business is of course innovating, and is in many ways getting ahead of us: if that means in services, in digital trade, or in data.

I think one of the big challenges for us all as an organisation, is to try and catch up. Look at the extraordinary innovation that has happened in digital through this pandemic – not just in the developed world, but also in the developing. That is why we want to see an outcome not just on the domestic regulation JSI [Joint Statement Initiative], but we also want to lock in significant progress on the e-commerce JSI by MC12, with a clear plan for completion after that. As others have said, we also have to tackle this digital divide by levelling up, not just domestically, but internationally too. It will come as no surprise DG, to say that we also support open, market-oriented trade, and our businesses want us to strengthen the rules in that space to ensure fair competition.

Many of my colleagues this morning, and you yourself DG, have rightly highlighted the issues of health and the environment. I think it is inconceivable that MC12, in the middle of a pandemic and standing at the precipice of a climate disaster, should not tackle the environment and health in a really significant and substantive manner. We really welcome the work that you have undertaken, and I am interested to hear and to engage with the pharma industry, to scale up production and supply. As others have said, none of us is safe until we are all safe. We have signed up to the Trade and Health Initiative and we need an ambitious health outcome at MC12. It is no surprise, too, as host of COP26 in Glasgow, that we believe that we have a real responsibility to future generations: to make sure that trade works to address this climate emergency, that it works for the environment, and most importantly of all, that the WTO enables this extraordinary green revolution, and all the opportunities that it brings for so many countries across the world. That is why we support the exploratory work on environmental services in the CTS-SS [Special Session of the Council for Trade in Services], as well as discussions in the TESSD [Trade and Environmental Sustainability Structured Discussions]. We would like to see a ministerial declaration on

the environment at MC12.

Like you, we are behind the Blue Revolution as well as the green revolution, and we want to see the negotiations on fisheries subsidies brought to a conclusion as soon as possible – in the interests of our people, our fish, and our planet. We have to remember the stakes with which we are playing.

You have asked us what we are going to do to help. We are going to do all we can within the G7: at the Foreign and Development Ministers meeting today, at the Trade Ministers meeting at the end of the month, and then at the summit in Cornwall in June, to support your efforts to revitalise the WTO and have a successful conclusion to MC12.

As you have said to us all today, we need to change our working culture, to read out a few less pre-prepared statements – this is not my pre-prepared statement I should add – and I think we need to do more than that. We need to do more listening, so that you can do more gavelling.

Director General, all power to you, and I wish you the very best of luck with your efforts.