

## Virtual Informal WTO Ministerial Gathering, 29 January 2021

### **Personal Concluding Remarks by the Chair, President of the Swiss Confederation and Head of the Federal Department for Economic Affairs, Education and Research, Guy Parmelin, Switzerland**

29 Ministers and high officials representing a broad spectrum of the WTO membership attended this year's Informal World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial Gathering in virtual format. In concluding and with warm thanks to all participants for their contributions, I would like to summarise the main points from our discussions as follows:

- Ministers stressed the urgency of the swift appointment of a new WTO Director-General as well as the confirmation of the date and venue of the 12<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference (MC12).
- Ministers reiterated their determination to maintain a credible multilateral trading system and to restore a climate of mutual trust.
- Ministers expressed their concerns about the enormous social and economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis. They highlighted the relevance of trade and the role of the WTO in containing the pandemic and promoting recovery. Many Ministers underlined the importance of ensuring the development of as well as an equitable and affordable access to medical goods, including vaccines. They addressed ways and means to achieve these goals, including the implementation of measures facilitating trade, the role of intellectual property and transparency.
- Ministers regretted that the negotiations on fisheries subsidies could not be completed in accordance with the end-2020 deadline foreseen in SDG 14.6. In light of the significance of this process for the sustainability of global fisheries, Ministers concurred that a comprehensive and effective agreement on fisheries subsidies should be concluded as soon as possible. Ministers agreed to step up efforts with a view to finding mutually acceptable solutions consistent with all the elements of the negotiating mandate.
- Ministers highlighted the importance of restoring a fully functional WTO dispute settlement system, which is a key pillar of the rules-based multilateral trading system.
- Many participants argued for further progress in agricultural trade policy reform at MC12 and asked for an outcome on domestic support and other issues. The issues of public stockholding and the special safeguard mechanism were highlighted by several Ministers.
- Many Ministers called for tangible outcomes, by MC12, on the Joint Statement Initiatives. *Inter alia* finalizing the process on Services Domestic Regulation and making substantial progress on E-commerce and Investment Facilitation as well as on Trade and Women's Economic Empowerment.

- The need to reform the WTO was widely acknowledged. A number of Ministers insisted on advancing diverse issues related to the special and differential treatment of developing and least developed countries. Some participants proposed to adjust WTO rules to present-day economic and competitive conditions.
  - Several Ministers supported new initiatives launched in response to global challenges such as the structured discussions on Trade and Environmental Sustainability.
  - Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to engage in the preparations for MC12 in order to advance key issues.
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