

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the digital economy's importance, accelerated the digital transformation and heightened the need for global rules governing digital trade. As Co-convenors of the Joint Statement Initiative on Electronic Commerce, we are committed to responding to this challenge. This initiative will update the WTO rulebook in an area of critical importance to the global economy.

We recognise the importance of the digital economy in post-COVID-19 economic recovery. The digital economy offers enormous opportunities for developing Members and least-developed country (LDC) Members, including by lowering the costs for businesses, particularly MSMEs, to access and participate in global markets. WTO rules and commitments on digital trade can help unlock these opportunities.

In this context, we will continue to drive negotiations towards a high standard and commercially meaningful outcome building on existing WTO agreements and frameworks. We will continue to promote inclusiveness and encourage the participation of as many WTO Members as possible in the negotiations, which were launched in our January 2019 Ministerial statement.

We welcome the substantial progress made to date in the negotiations. We have achieved good convergence in negotiating groups on eight articles –

The outcomes already achieved in these areas

will deliver important benefits including boosting consumer confidence and supporting businesses trading online.

In addition, we have seen the consolidation of text proposals in other areas, including on customs duties on electronic transmissions, cross-border data flows, data localisation, source code, electronic transactions frameworks, cybersecurity, and electronic invoicing, as well as advanced discussions on market access. We will intensify negotiations in these areas from early 2022. We note that provisions that enable and promote the flow of data are key to high standard and commercially meaningful outcome.

Participants in the initiative support the continuation of the multilateral e-commerce moratorium in fostering certainty and predictability for businesses. The co-convenors consider it crucial that the initiative makes permanent among participants the practice of not imposing customs duties on electronic transmissions.

We recognise the importance of supporting the engagement of developing Members and LDC Members in the initiative, including implementation of commitments. We will continue to deepen the discussion, including through a series of roundtables, dialogues and webinars, on capacity building options and support for implementation for developing Members and LDC Members in 2022.

