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Together these mean that we simply cannot continue as if it is business as usual. In fact, you might characterise it as business unusual. And the task for both international organisations and nation states is to rise to the challenge that it presents.

The WTO is one of the key institutions in that challenge. I believe that this is a great organisation, full of talent, expertise and knowledge. We have been at the heart of the global project of trade liberalisation that has helped take a billion of our fellow human beings out of extreme poverty in just one generation, a tremendous achievement in human history.

But I know from talking to many of you, including in this last week, that there is a widespread feeling that things are not as they should be. Yes, there are technical issues to be overcome but the real problems of the WTO are not technical. Our problem is the lack of political momentum.

There is too little political will to make the compromises needed for the multilateral trading system to evolve and too little vision to make those compromises easier. We must rediscover that political will and find the

right language to express our vision about the opportunities that trade can bring to a new generation.

The global public should see the WTO as having an indispensable seat at the top table of multilateral organisations. When people think about the United Nations, or the IMF or the World Bank, they should also think about the WTO.

So it is not where the new DG comes from that matters but the skills and experience, especially the political experience, that they are able to bring to the organisation for the benefit of each every one of our members.

I believe that my 28 years in politics, and my years serving in senior cabinet posts...

...such as trade...

...and representing the UK at the top table on global issues...

...give me the right experience to bring the renewed momentum, commitment and compromise, which will allow us to return this institution to greater global relevance.

A RULES BASED SYSTEM

I have always been a passionate believer in a rules-based international trade system.

Open trade between sovereign nations relies on stable, predictable and dependable rules. These rules help politicians stay honest and resist the protectionist measures which – let's be honest – have advocates in some form in all our systems. If we adhere to, and live up to, these rules they can help to promote political stability and domestic economic progress, development, jobs and growth which is what we all want to see.

And let me say this if I may – if we want those we represent to believe in the concept of free trade then no amount of abstract philosophical discussion here in Geneva will achieve it. Show people jobs, show them prosperity and hope for the next generation, for that is how we will be validated in their eyes.

CHALLENGES AHEAD

Now, one of the first tasks for a new DG will be to deliver a successful 12th Ministerial Conference. The contents are, of course, for the members to agree but it is essential that the DG works with members to produce ideas and an agenda that, yes, excites us here at the WTO but is also seen as relevant outside. It must focus on outcomes, not process, helping the real businesses – large, medium, small and micro – upon which real prosperity depends.

So what are some of our specific challenges?

Well, despite remaining gaps, members are perhaps closer than they have been in the past to agreeing new rules to discipline harmful fisheries subsidies, and we must push for an outcome as soon as possible to meet the SDG goal set by Leaders. But, this is not just about fish, but about showing that the WTO can take steps on sustainability more generally – an area where members are rightly bringing forward other ideas, and where the public attach great importance.

I know many members are also keen to make progress on Joint Initiatives on e-commerce, services, MSMEs and investment – these will be an important part of the discussions in the coming months.

And of course agriculture. Subsidies, public stockholding for food security, cotton, and other issues will remain critical. This remains perhaps our most difficult challenge something that I have to say I'm well very aware of, from hours we spent discussing this in trade ministerial meetings. Anyone who doesn't understand what this means should not be applying for the job of Director General of the WTO. But it's difficult for a reason, because it is crucial to the livelihoods of so many of our citizens.

Finally, many members understandably want to make progress on critical questions of WTO reform. Again something I hope we can return to in Q&A.

There is a reason why all of this matters. As we emerge from the pandemic, we cannot yet judge what the economic damage will be. But we can bet it will lie somewhere on the spectrum between bad dream and worst nightmare. And we know from experience that the burden could easily fall heaviest on those least able to sups

And that is why I'm so concerned about the rise in trade restrictive measures taken in recent years which are starting to block up the arteries of global trade – something which, as a medical doctor, I find a very unpleasant analogy.

Last month's WTO report on G20 trade restrictive measures showed that since 2009 the proportion of G20 imports covered by such measures has doubled roughly every two years, rising from only 0.7% in 2009 to an astonishing 10.3% by the end of 2019.

Now, as trade secretary I was a huge supporter of aid for trade and in that time the UK tripled our contribution through Geneva to more than £100 million per year. But what is the point in working harder to assist development when at the same time some of the world's biggest economies are increasing their barriers to trade, M(h)9 (e).9 ()0.5 (t)-W7(bi)Erthe en

Let me turn, if I may, to one of the other main issues being discussed in the current DG selection process, that of gender. I recognise the importance of this debate. Let me just make two points.

First, I believe that the role of women in trade is of profound importance, and we need to ensure that all women can have access to the opportunities that trade brings. I am proud to say that during my time as Trade Secretary, the UK significantly scaled up funding to the ITC's SheTrades initiative, supporting women-owned businesses including MSMEs to access the benefits of trade in developing countries.

Second, I think it is fundamentally wrong that trade departments and institutions around the world are – to a large extent – still male-dominated, and I believe this needs to change. When I was asked by former Prime Minister Theresa May to set up, from s(n)-0.6 (om,n(m)7tc2 ((n)h5 (p)1

I believe that the empowerment of women, including through trade, is a fundamental economic and development objective – just as fundamental as access to education or political expression. I also believe that in support of that goal we should send out an unequivocal message about the powerful and equal role of women in trade right here, in the WTO.

CONCLUSION

I began by talking about how COVID has shown us how interconnected and interdependent we have become. Let me close by sharing something that I learned in my time at the most senior levels in politics including as both defence and trade secretary.

It is this: trade is not an end in itself. It is a means to an end. It is a means by which

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One of my political heroes, Winston Churchill said in 1953 that we stand, 'at this hour...before the portals of supreme catastrophe and of measureless reward'. Perhaps, just perhaps, this is such a moment for the WTO with the choices we face.

Thank you for doing me the great honour of allowing me to be part of one of those choices.