

EVENT: MC10 Ministerial Meeting, Opening Plenary

INTERVENTION

Ms Chairman, Vice Chairs, Ministerial colleagues, Director-General Azevêdo and other respected guests, I am honoured to address the Tenth Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization.

This year, we celebrate the WTO's twentieth anniversary and the first WTO Ministerial Conference to be held in Africa. It is important to acknowledge the contribution of African Members

Earlier this week, the Cairns Group reiterated that stance. We are committed to working towards a credible export competition that covers all of the issues where it is possible for us to reach agreement. Such an outcome would demonstrate that the WTO is capable of delivering outcomes which benefit both developed and developing members alike.

Our second task this week is to find a way to address the deep problems of the WTO's negotiation function and move forward from Nairobi.

Clearly, it would not be credible to reaffirm the Doha Round here in Nairobi.

We all know that Doha cannot be finished any time soon. Equally, we know that there is no consensus to bring the Round to an end.

The issue is not whether Doha is alive or not. The issue is how do we collectively make the WTO's negotiation function more effective. That should be our focus post Nairobi. And we should have a period of reflection in 2016 to assess ways the WTO can deliver future outcomes.

Australia sees merit in exploring new approaches to global trade liberalisation and reform, approaches that have the prospect of delivering substantial outcomes in time frames that are meaningful to business and other stakeholders. This is what ultimately will contribute to global economic growth.

I want to emphasise that Australia's interest in different and more agile negotiating approaches does not in any way undermine our commitment to ensuring that trade rules work in the interests of all Members at all levels of development.

On the contrary, it is precisely because of our deep commitment to such outcomes that we are now supporting different approaches.

In considering new approaches, it is sobering to recall that the WTO has not been able to agree to lower one tariff multilaterally since the Uruguay Round. Nor has it cut trade-distorting subsidies by one dollar.

At the same time, free trade agreements have been flourishing, delivering preferential market access, addressing new issues and developing rules for the contemporary global economy.

There is clearly no lack of interest in pursuing trade liberalisation and reform through preferential arrangements.

This raises the question of how the WTO can ensure the positives around free trade agreements are multilateralised through the WTO for the benefit of all members.

We believe that one way forward for the WTO is through plurilateral negotiations. When completed and implemented, the Information Technology Agreement and the Environmental Goods Agreement will provide extensive tariff elimination.

This more flexible negotiating model should not be seen as weakening the WTO.

Rather, by delivering a new negotiating dynamic that generates benefits for business and consumers, it will bolster the WTO, putting it once more at the centre of efforts to underpin sustainable global growth.

Australia believes that full participation of members in the WTO is important to a strong and effective system.

This year, we have committed support of A\$15 million to WTO-related initiatives on aid for trade. This includes contributions of:

- A\$3 million to Phase 2 of the Enhanced Integrated Framework to help LDCs address their constraints to trade, and
- A\$6 million contribution over three years to the World Bank's Trade Facilitation Support Program and A\$1 million to the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement Facility, to assist developing countries implement the WTO Agreement on Trade Facilitation.

We have also made a commitment to contribute to the Global Alliance on Trade Facilitation and helped to ensure an LDC trade target was included in the Sustainable Development Goals.

Finally, Australia is committed to developing a way forward for the WTO that serves the interests of all Members, but equally responds to the reality of the contemporary global trade and investment environment by changing and adapting.

This agenda is quite simply too important to allow differences to be a stumbling block to finding agreement.