

## 12th WTO Ministerial Conference (MC12)

12 – 15 June 2022 / Geneva

### **Statement by H.E. Dr Martin Kocher Federal Minister of Digital and Economic Affairs**

First and foremost, I would like to convey my deep gratitude to Kazakhstan for chairing this Twelfth WTO Ministerial Conference and to Switzerland for hosting this important political event in Geneva. I may also express my deep appreciation to the Chair of this Ministerial Conference, H.E. Timur Suleimenov, Deputy Chief of the President's and the President's Envoy for International Trade of Kazakhstan, whose able leadership will guide us in our work.

I welcome our new Director-General Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, whom I wish all the best in her demanding post. I also owe my thanks to the WTO Secretariat and its skilled staff for its valuable assistance in preparing this Ministerial Conference.

This Twelfth Ministerial Conference is taking place under the extraordinary and, in recent times, unprecedented circumstances of a global pandemic, of sharply rising food prices and of severe uncertainties on future food markets and supplies.

Today, still tackling the global pandemic, the global trade world is not the same as used to be. In many aspects, a new trading environment has emerged on top of a rulebook that needs urgent adaptation to current challenges. Therefore, the WTO must deliver answers to burning systemic questions and respond to legal gaps in the rule book.

First, concluding the negotiations on Fisheries Subsidies is an important step to preserve the relevance of the WTO.

Second, international trade shall develop means to overcome the current and future pandemics. Therefore, the WTO must develop a common approach on trade and health, allowing for a swift and unhindered global distribution of vaccines, medical goods and necessary technological information across borders for the sake and well-being of all people.

The proposed Ministerial Declaration on the WTO Response to the Pandemic is a comprehensive response to the current and future pandemics, secures overall crisis preparedness and enhances Members' resilience.

Third, the need for a reform of the WTO as a negotiating forum and of its capability to update the WTO-rulebook to the needs of the XXI century is obvious. A priority is the re-institution of the dispute settlement system by a binding two-tier, independent and impartial adjudication of trade disputes and on the basis of the negative consensus principle.

Fourth, plurilateral initiatives have become a means of expanding the rulebook for those willing to go further and with the aim of multilateralization as soon as possible. The ongoing initiatives launched at MC 11 respond to the current challenges and developments in the international trading system and these negotiations have made significant progress. Beyond that, the WTO

cannot ignore the new area of digital trade which already bears a significant impact on all sectors of trade and which demands a set of globally binding rules.

In order to react to the burning challenges of climate change, new plurilateral initiatives shall contribute to an environmentally friendly and resilient economy worldwide. To this effect, the statement on Environmental Sustainability aims at launching a discussion on trade-related climate measures and policies with the possibility to start mandated negotiations at MC13. The same applies to the proposed statement on Fossil Fuel Subsidy Reform and the statement on Plastics Pollution and Sustainable Plastics Trade.

The global pandemic has highlighted the important role of Micro, Small and Medium Sized Enterprises and of women as key systemic pillars especially in developing countries' economies. The overall devastating effects in daily lives would have been much larger without the essential supply services entertained by small businesses, in many cases run by women. It is therefore high time to apply a "gender lens" across all sectors of trade and that the proposed Declaration on the Advancement of Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment within Trade receives overall support.

This Ministerial Conference is bound to deliver. A failure is not affordable. We must seize this opportunity and bring the WTO back on track as a rule maker and back to relevance as a key regulator within the multilateral trading system.

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