

GUIDELINES FOR ARRANGEMENTS ON RELATIONS  
WITH NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Decision adopted by the General Council on 18 July 1996

1. Under Article V:2 of the Marrakesh Agreement establishing the WTO "the General Council may make appropriate arrangements for consultation and cooperation with non-governmental organizations concerned with matters related to those of the WTO".
2. In deciding on these guidelines for arrangements on relations with non-governmental organizations, Members recognize the rôle NGOs can play to increase the awareness of the public in respect of WTO activities and agree in this regard to improve transparency and develop communication with NGOs.
3. To contribute to achieve greater transparency Members will ensure more information about WTO activities in particular by making available documents which would be derestricted more promptly than in the past. To enhance this process the Secretariat will make available on on-line computer network the material which is accessible to the public, including derestricted documents.
4. The Secretariat should play a more active rôle in its direct contacts with NGOs who, as a valuable resource, can contribute to the accuracy and richness of the public debate. This interaction with NGOs should be developed through various means such as *inter alia* the organization on an *ad hoc* basis of symposia on specific WTO-related issues, informal arrangements to receive the information NGOs may wish to make available for consultation by interested delegations and the continuation of past practice of responding to requests for general information and briefings about the WTO.
5. If chairpersons of WTO councils and committees participate in discussions or meetings with NGOs it shall be in their personal capacity unless that particular council or committee decides otherwise.
6. Members have pointed to the special character of the WTO, which is both a legally binding intergovernmental treaty of rights and obligations among its Members and a forum for negotiations. As a result of extensive discussions, there is currently a broadly held view that it would not be possible for NGOs to be directly involved in the work of the WTO or its meetings. Closer consultation and cooperation with NGOs can also be met constructively through appropriate processes at the national level where lies primary responsibility for taking into account the different elements of public interest which are brought to bear on trade policy-making.