



## An overview of the WTO Public Forum 2012

Geneva, September 24-26



Public Forum Conference room

Over the past few years, the WTO Public Forum has firmly established itself as a major event at which governments, Parliamentarians non-governmental organizations, academics, businesses and students can come together to discuss the latest issues regarding the multilateral trading system.

Opened by former Swiss President Micheline Calmy-Rey, this year the Public Forum posed the question: "Is multilateralism in crisis?" The Forum provided an opportunity for participants to analyse whether multilateralism is indeed in a state of crisis, taking into account both the Doha Round deadlock and WTO activities that continue to work well. These include trade monitoring, administering existing WTO rules, and trade capacity building for developing countries. The new world order in which the WTO operates will also be among the topics for discussion.



Pascal Lamy at the Atrium of the WTO walking with the Members of the High Level Panel

This year's Forum had the following themes: formulating new approaches to multilateral trade opening in areas such as trade facilitation; addressing 21st-century issues and identifying areas in need of new regulations; and looking at the role of non-state actors in strengthening the multilateral trading system. The results of these discussions provided some guidance on how the WTO can participate in better addressing world problems and improving global governance.

While making progress on the Doha Round remains a priority, the WTO recognizes that it needs to continue to examine all aspects of its work, and to contribute to greater cooperation across all areas of global governance.

**Approximately 1'200 participants attended 44 sessions of the 2012 Public Forum.**



Poken in use during the Public Forum

### Day 1, 24 September

In **welcoming** participants to the Public Forum, Director-General Pascal Lamy said that "the rules of the game — whether in the trade sphere, in the economic sphere, in the environmental or food security spheres — and indeed across all areas of international policy making, are in need of adjustment."

He said that "this year's forum will deal with a vast array of challenges that you, yourselves, have brought to the house of trade. Over a three-day period, we will be hearing from you on issues as diverse as trade and the environment and the regional Free Trade Agreements."

The former President of the Swiss Confederation, Ms Micheline Calmy-Rey, in the Forum's **inaugural speech**, said that "multilateralism is failing on many fronts and is clearly unable to deliver in these very difficult times we are witnessing across the globe."

As an example, she said that "the inability of the WTO Members to agree on the conclusion of the Doha Round is certainly a setback that is very difficult to understand particularly within the context of the current crisis."



Public Forum Atrium

Ms Calmy-Rey commended "the excellent work done by WTO to monitor protectionist pressures," adding that the multilateral trading system "can help (WTO Members) contain extreme protectionist measures."

The work of the WTO was discussed, in particular the importance of this institution to remove frictions, the negotiations on trade facilitation to facilitate customs procedures and to remove "trade obstructions", the fight against protectionism through its monitoring mechanism and also its work to encourage more financing for trade.

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## Day 2, 25 September

Global economic problems, including record unemployment in many parts of the world, indicate that multilateralism is in crisis, and the WTO must be reformed to be in better position to help workers, farmers, businesses and the youth. This was the assessment of a high-level panel moderated by Director-General Pascal Lamy on the second day of Public Forum 2012. Different opinions were discussed on the question whether multilateralism is in crisis, and if it is, how it is affecting work and objectives of the participants in the panel.



Anabel Gonzalez, Minister of Trade of Costa Rica

Ms Sharan Burrow, Secretary-General of International Trade Union Confederation, said that there was no doubt that multilateralism is in crisis as shown by current economic indicators, including record unemployment and falling income share of working people, underlining that trade and economic institutions must be reformed.

Former President of Botswana Festus Gontebanye Mogae indicated that African countries have been experiencing the crisis for a long time, with high rates of unemployment. Despite the fact that developed countries have started to engage into bilateral trade deals, African countries prefer the multilateral approach where the rules apply equally for everybody.



Lubna Al Qasimi, Minister for Foreign Trade of UAE

Mr Frederico Fleury Curado, President and CEO of Embraer S.A, Brazil, said that multilateralism has been important for Latin America's recent economic growth and urged a conclusion to the Doha Round, even if it does not cover the entire package. He said businesses need multilateral institutions to ensure a level playing field.

Mr George Yeo, former Foreign Minister of Singapore and Vice Chairman of Kerry Group Limited, mentioned that people do not really want a global government, which can create even bigger problems. He commended the WTO for helping move economic policies in the right direction.

Mr Talal Abu-Ghazaleh, Chairman and founder of Talal Abu-Ghazaleh Overseas Corporation, Jordan, called for revisiting the function of the WTO as a negotiating forum, including finding an alternative to decision-making by consensus. Finally, he urged making accession into the WTO less difficult, noting that half of the Arab world was still outside the organization.

Mr Fujimori Yoshiaki, president and CEO of JS Group Corporation Tokyo, said that private industry has been working in an environment of protectionism for a long time. Businesses have to adapt to the exchange rate issue, the rise of RTAs, new non-tariff measures, and various national laws and regulations. He said that WTO must have a mechanism that would allow participation of private industry in its work.

Mr Pradeep Singh Mehta, Secretary-General of CUTS International, India, underlined that multilateralism has to deal with issues other than trade that cross borders, like climate change, energy issues and security concerns. He said that the Doha Round is at an impasse because of between levels of ambition, and this is sending very negative signals. Finally, he said that despite all these, multilateralism is still the way to go.

## Day 3, 26 September

During the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, a high-level panel agreed that trade enables job creation, but jobs will not be created by trade alone. It is the role of governments to put in place the right domestic measures for job creation and income distribution. More international co-operation and coherence between the trade and job agendas is highly desirable, they concluded.

## Youth Ambassador Panel



Pascal Lamy and Youth Ambassador Winners

The WTO launched the “WTO Youth Ambassador Programme” during the closing session of the 2011 Public Forum with a view to involve young people in the discussions on international economic governance issues, encourage their engagement in public policy discussions and bring new perspectives to the debates.

For the first time a Youth Ambassador Panel including the participation of the 2 winners of the Youth Ambassador Video and Essay contest, as well as other students was featured in the PF programme.

Winners shared their thoughts on the main question of the Forum on Social Media Corner:

Karina Hehs, WTO Youth Ambassador video winner, São Paulo, “I don't think multilateralism is in crisis. What I think is in crisis is our negotiation models, and for this we need new solutions and new ideas. That's why the WTO is bringing their youth ambassadors with their youth ideas to renew the scenario”

Ankita Mishra, WTO Youth Ambassador essay winner, Pune “No I don't think that multilateralism is in crisis. However, we do have a certain set of challenges that we need to overcome as a global society. ... We need to encourage nations to cooperate”

## Economic data

### Slow global growth to hit trade in 2012 and 2013

21 September 2012

Slowing global output growth has led WTO economists to downgrade their 2012 forecast for world trade expansion to 2.5% from 3.7% and to scale back their 2013 estimate to 4.5% from 5.6%. "In an increasingly interdependent world, economic shocks in one region can quickly spread to others. Recently announced measures to reinforce the euro and boost growth in the United States are therefore extremely welcome," said WTO Director-General Pascal Lamy. But more needs to be done. We need a renewed commitment to revitalize the multilateral trading system which can restore economic certainty at a time when it is badly needed. The last thing the world economy needs right now is the threat of rising protectionism."

## Accessions

### Laos' WTO membership terms agreed — next stop: General Council

Geneva, 28 September 2012

The terms of Laos' WTO membership were agreed by the countries negotiating with the least-developed nation on 28 September 2012, and now go for approval by all 157 current WTO members in the General Council on 26 October. Essentially the negotiation is now over. The membership package now goes to the General Council for formal approval. After that, Laos still has to ratify the agreement and inform the WTO that it has done so by depositing its "Instrument of Acceptance". Thirty days later it officially joins the WTO.

## Technical assistance

Geneva, 4 September 2012

Germany donates EUR 150,000 for food, animal and plant health standards

Geneva, 13 September 2012

Norway offers CHF2.4 million to WTO training programme for developing countries

Geneva, 18 September 2012

US contributes \$1 million and \$150,000 to technical assistance for developing countries

Geneva, 28 September 2012

Liechtenstein offers CHF 40,000 to WTO training for developing countries

## Dispute Settlement Body

Geneva, 3 September 2012

Argentina files dispute against the US on imports of lemons

Geneva, 17 September 2012

US files dispute against China on subsidies to the automobile industry

Geneva, 17 September 2012

China files dispute against US countervailing and anti-dumping measures

Geneva, 27 September 2012

EU will ask for "countermeasures" in aircraft dispute with the US

Geneva, 28 September 2012

Panel sets up on Australia's tobacco measures

## Upcoming events:

### 9-11 October

Trade Policy Review: Norway

### 15-17 October

Trade Policy Review: Bangladesh

### 23 October

Dispute Settlement Body

### 30 October - 1 November

Trade Policy Review: Israel

### 13-15 November

Trade Policy Review: Iceland

### 19 November

Dispute Settlement Body

### 21-23 November

Trade Policy Review: EAC (Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Burundi and Rwanda)



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## Featured media

### LATEST PODCASTS:

26.09.2012: *WTO Public Forum*

### LATEST VIDEOS:

26.09.2012: *Public Forum 2012: Highlights*

25.09.2012: *WTO Youth Ambassadors*

05.09.2012: *Interview: Aid for Trade in Africa*

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### We would like to hear from you:

World Trade Organization  
Information and External Relations Division

Rue de Lausanne 154  
1211 Geneva, Switzerland

[wto4mps@wto.org](mailto:wto4mps@wto.org)  
[www.wto.org](http://www.wto.org)

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