



WTO PUBLIC FORUM

Is Multilateralism in Crisis?

24-26 September 2012

With the recent economic slow-down, limited activity in the Doha Round negotiations and an increase in protectionist measures world-wide, the multilateral trading system is being put to the test.

At this challenging time, the WTO Public Forum will look at novel ways to update the WTO rule-book and to address the current obstacles facing the international trading system. It will also take a closer look at the factors shaping 21st century trade, with a view to identifying solutions to the challenges that lie ahead.

Topics for discussion include the WTO's trade monitoring role, the supervision of the existing WTO rule-book, and capacity building for developing countries. The new world order in which the WTO operates will also be discussed.

The following core themes will be the focus of this year's Forum:

- I. Formulating new approaches to multilateral trade opening in areas where headway can be made, such as trade facilitation;
- II. Addressing 21st-century issues and identifying areas in need of new regulations, or which offer scope for future rule-making;
- III. Looking at the role of non-state actors in strengthening the multilateral trading system.

The discussion of these themes should provide valuable guidance on how the WTO can face today's challenges and improve global governance.

As Director-General Pascal Lamy has said, "the difficulties we, and many other multilateral institutions, have encountered in recent years is indisputable proof that yesterday's solutions simply cannot be applied to the problems we face today."

Core themes

I. Formulating new approaches to multilateral trade opening

Objectives: To identify challenges facing multilateralism today and to look at ways of making headway in topics where progress can be made.

Discussion points: While the Doha Round is at an impasse, certain elements of the WTO work programme continue to work well, such as trade monitoring, the administration of the existing rule-book, and capacity building for developing countries. Topics under active discussion within the Doha Round negotiations include services and trade facilitation (i.e. easing the transfer of goods across borders). Non-Doha issues being discussed include government procurement practices, the expansion of the WTO Information Technology Agreement, WTO accession for least-developed countries (LDCs), and special and differential treatment for LDCs.

In addition, there is a need to ensure compatibility between the WTO and preferential trade agreements (PTAs). Institutional decision-making at the WTO may need to be addressed to encourage a more progressive and responsive WTO agenda that could contribute to greater efficiency in multilateral negotiations on trade rules.

II. Addressing 21st century issues

Objectives: To reflect on the existing trade rules and examine how the WTO should adapt to deal with 21st century challenges, including food security, trade in natural resources and their impact on the environment, the link between trade and jobs, as well as the phenomenon of global supply chains.

Discussion points: The political, economic, and social aspects of the world we live in today are very different to those that existed a decade ago. While the nature of trade has changed radically over the past two decades, economists' and governments' thinking about trade governance has not. As a result, there is a widening gap between existing trade rules and the current realities of the new century. Examining how the WTO should adapt to deal with these new challenges has become increasingly important as the organization reflects on the way forward.

III. Looking at the role of non-state actors in strengthening the multilateral trading system

Objectives: To provide an opportunity for non-state actors, such as civil society organizations, to look at their role in strengthening the multilateral trading system in these challenging times as the WTO reflects on the way forward. In particular, discussions will focus on how civil society should monitor the implementation of trade agreements.

Discussion points: In the last few years, the level of participation of non-state actors in the international trading system has increased substantially. The WTO acknowledges the important role of non-state actors in increasing public awareness of trade issues and WTO activities and in ensuring accountability for decisions taken at the international level. The Forum provides an opportunity to address how non-state actors can further strengthen the international trading system.

Programme in brief

Monday 24 September	Tuesday 25 September	Wednesday 26 September
07:30 – 21:00 Registration of Participants/ Badge Collection	07:30 – 21:00 Registration of Participants/ Badge Collection	07:30 – 20:00 Registration of Participants/ Badge Collection
9:30 – 10:00 Opening Ceremony (CR)	09:00 – 11:00 4 Working Sessions (CR, S1, S2 and S3)	09:00 – 11:00 3 Working Sessions (S1, S2 and S3)
10:00 – 12:00 High-Level Inaugural Panel Is Multilateralism in Crisis? (CR)	12:00 – 13:30 High-Level Panel of Multi-Stakeholders (CR)	12:00 – 13:30 High-Level Panel on Trade and Jobs (CR)
12:00 – 14:00 Lunch Break 12:00 – 14:00 Lunch Sessions (S1, S2 and S3)	13:15 – 14:00 Lunch Break 12:00 – 14:00 Lunch Session (S1) 13:00 – 15:00 Lunch Sessions (S2 and S3)	13:15 – 14:00 Lunch Break 12:00 – 14:00 Lunch Sessions (S1, S2)
14:00 – 16:00 4 Working Sessions (CR, S1, S2 and S3)	14:00 – 16:00 High-Level Panel on Global Value Chains: Implications for Trade Policy (CR)	14:15 – 16:15 4 Working Sessions (CR, S1, S2 and S3)
16:15 – 18:15 4 Working Sessions (CR, S1, S2 and S3)	16:15 – 18:15 4 Working Sessions (CR, S1, S2 and S3)	16:15 – 18:15 4 Working Sessions (CR, S1, S2 and S3)
18:15 – 20:15 Dinner Reception (Atrium)	18:15 – 20:15 Evening Sessions (S1, S2 and S3)	18:15 – 19:15 Closing Session (CR)

Frequently asked questions

Who can participate in the Forum?

Representatives of governments, civil society organizations, businesses, trade unions, legislators, academics, students and the public at large are welcome to participate in the Forum.

Who organizes the sessions?

Sessions at the Public Forum are organized by the WTO Secretariat as well as by stakeholders such as civil society organizations, business groups, law firms, universities and research institutes, trade unions, members of parliaments and other inter-governmental organizations.

Where does the Public Forum take place?

All sessions of the WTO Public Forum take place at the WTO headquarters at the Centre William Rappard, Rue de Lausanne 154, Geneva, Switzerland.

What are the working languages of the meetings?

The meetings are held in the three working languages of the WTO: English, French and Spanish. Interpretation will be available in all three languages. Exceptionally, there will be no interpretation for the evening sessions (sessions 27 – 30) on Tuesday 25 September and the Ideas workshops, which will be conducted in English.

How can I register to attend?

Those wishing to attend the WTO Public Forum must register online at: www.wto.org/publicforum2012. The deadline for registration is Midnight, Wednesday 19 September 2012.

Where can I find additional information about the programme?

This is available on the WTO Public Forum website: www.wto.org/publicforum

Do I need a visa?

Please check well in advance of your journey for visa requirements with the Swiss embassy or consulate nearest to you. Please note that the WTO does not organise visa arrangements.

Who pays for my journey?

Participation at the Forum is free of charge. Travel and accommodation costs are to be borne by participants.

Who organizes the high-level panels?

High-level panels are organized by the WTO Secretariat and are designed to address broad issues and to set the tone for further discussions. They feature prominent personalities on the international scene, who share their views on the issues debated.

What is the aim of the other sessions?

The other sessions provide a more specific insight into a particular issue. The discussion can be more technical and may involve experts, professionals and opinion leaders. The panellists introduce the issue and offer their point of view to the audience, while the moderator engages the participants in an open discussion.

Where can I meet other participants?

The atrium reception is open to all registered participants. It allows organizers, panellists and the public to meet in an informal way and to engage in a relaxed exchange of views. It also offers networking opportunities.

What happens at the closing session?

The closing session will provide an overview of the main issues addressed throughout the Forum and will highlight the main conclusions and recommendations suggested by participants.

Useful links

Getting around Geneva: <http://www.geneve-tourisme.ch/>

Accommodation: www.genevashotels.com

Weather: <http://www.meteoschweiz.admin.ch/web/en/weather.html>

Bus Schedule: <http://www.tpg.ch>

Train Schedule: <http://mct.sbb.ch/mct/en/reisen.htm>

Geneva Airport: www.gva.ch

For more information please contact

María Pérez-Esteve

Public Forum Co-ordinator

Email: maria.perez-estev@wto.org

Phone: + 41 22 739 55 46

Fax: + 41 22 739 57 77

An interactive forum

Social media activities

One of the main aims of the Public Forum is to engage with the wider public as well as those attending the Forum.

This year's Public Forum will be more interactive than ever. You can follow it on the WTO website (www.wto.org/publicforum), Facebook (www.facebook.com/worldtradeorganization), Twitter (twitter.com/WTO) and other social media platforms.

The Forum will discuss whether multilateralism is in a state of crisis. Tell us what you think. We'd love to hear your views, whether you are here in person or participating from afar!

- Social media corner: This is a brand-new feature of the Public Forum. You will have the opportunity to record a video message (of up to 2 minutes) in response to the question: Is Multilateralism in Crisis? The videos will be streamed on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube (www.youtube.com/user/WTO).
- The social media corner will be open to all from 13.00 to 14.00 and from 16.00 to 17.00 on each day of the Forum. Please join us in the Delegates Lounge to make your recording.
- Live updates: On the WTO's website, follow discussions at the Forum in real time, and tell us what you think.

- Twitter: Receive regular updates as events unfold and participate in the debates. The best tweets will be posted on the Public Forum web pages. Get involved, start tweeting!
- Facebook: Follow discussions at the Forum and add your comments.
- Daily summaries: Keep up to date with the day's events through daily news items posted on the WTO website.
- Photos: A wide selection of photos will be made available on the WTO website and on Flickr (www.flickr.com/photos/world_trade_organization)

Discussion forum

In the run-up to this year's Public Forum, the WTO has launched a discussion forum on the WTO web site. You are invited to submit short articles (of no more than 1,000 words) on the themes of the Forum and to give your views on the articles submitted by others.

Please send your articles to publicforum2012@wto.org, indicating discussion forum on the subject line.

Poken - a new way of exchanging information

This year's Public Forum is to be enhanced by the introduction of "Poken" – an innovative and simple USB stick aimed at eliminating paper waste and boosting networking opportunities. On arrival, all participants will receive their own device to allow them to collect digital information from smart tags displayed at various points within the WTO.

Collect useful information about the Public Forum as well as relevant WTO publications and videos by simply touching one of these tags with your Poken USB stick. By touching your device to another participant's Poken, you will also be able to exchange your "virtual" business card details, and sync them with your phone or Outlook address book. Poken USB sticks glow green when contact has been made. At the end of the Forum, you will have collected a rich resource of digital information, including the contact details of all the participants you have met. So no more need for exchanging business cards and much less paper waste!

You will also have the chance to provide feedback with a "touch survey". Simply touch your Poken to clearly identified "survey" tags at each session.

We hope that this simple and "green" technology will make your Forum experience modern, fun and efficient!

Ideas Workshops

The Ideas Workshop is a brand-new feature of this year's Public Forum. Each workshop - one for each day of the Forum - will give you the opportunity to share your ideas on a number of key trade topics in a relaxed and interactive environment.

The workshops bring together experts from diverse backgrounds to address a topical trade challenge. Unlike the panel sessions, the workshops will deal with a particular problem and focus on coming up with concrete solutions.

How it works

Once the topic has been introduced by the keynote speaker, the participants are divided into smaller groups to explore the topic from different perspectives. At the end of the workshop, each group presents its proposals to the other workshop participants.

The aim of the workshops is to allow participants to come up with innovative solutions. Brainstorming among participants from different backgrounds will provide a creative environment in which new ideas can flourish. Through teamwork and collaboration, participants will work on turning individual good ideas into collective ground-breaking solutions.

The Workshop in a nutshell

- Launch a topic
- Identify the problem and possible answers
- Explore in smaller groups the problem from different angles
- Provide solutions
- Report back to the other participants

What makes a good workshop?

A good workshop needs participants who are willing to commit fully to exploring the chosen issue.

During the three hours allowed, participants should be willing to fully immerse themselves in the discussions. Put simply, you should be able to answer “yes” to the following questions:

- Are you available for the three hours devoted to the workshop?
- Can you devote yourself entirely to the workshop (i.e. switch of mobile phones, email etc.)?
- Are you willing to tackle topics that might be outside your areas of expertise?

When?

A workshop will be held from 14:30 to 17:30 on 24 and 25 September and from 10:00 to 13:00 on 26 September. Please note that registration is required in advance and that space is limited.

Location

WTO Training Room (4th floor, Centre William Rappard)