

ITEM 7: WTO YOUNG PROFESSIONALS PROGRAMME

GENERAL COUNCIL, 20 FEBRUARY

DG STATEMENT

Thank you Mr Chairman.

Concerns have often been raised that the make-up of the WTO Secretariat does not fully reflect the diversity of its membership.

There is a clear need to address this point, while of course abiding by our existing rules and regulations. All WTO recruitment processes follow a very strict, formal and well-structured procedure, which is essentially based on merit.

Bearing this formal, structured process in mind, as Director-General I have made increasing the diversity of the Secretariat a personal priority.

One thing that we have observed is that we could have more candidates from developing and least-developed countries. If we are to make further progress on the diversity issue then we need to encourage such candidates to come forward, and we need them to be competitive in the recruitment process.

So I think that this is an area where we can help.

And that is what the idea of a Young Professionals Programme in the WTO is all about. I wanted to raise this today so that all members are aware.

DDG Agah has been leading this project – and I want to take this opportunity to thank him for the effort he has put into this work.

The proposal for a WTO Young Professionals Programme has already been presented to the CTD and the CBFA, and has been explained in informal consultations with various Group coordinators.

These include the LDC Group, Africa Group, ALBA Group, Arab Group, ASEAN, GRULAC, and the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat representative.

The objective of the Programme is to enhance the knowledge and skills of young professionals from eligible participating Members on WTO issues.

As I have suggested, it would therefore help to widen the pool of candidates who can compete for recruitment in the WTO and other regional and international organisations.

I won't give you a full outline of the Programme now, but the key points are as follows.

It will be focused primarily on recruiting young professionals from developing and least-developed country members. The idea would be that, in the initial phase, priority would be given to countries without any representation in the Secretariat.

The selected young professionals will work in the Secretariat for a maximum of 12 months. In the first year of the Programme we will only recruit 5 Young Professionals, though the number could increase in subsequent years, depending on the funds we can generate.

There will be no extension of this one year period, nor any guarantee of a job in the WTO. Our hope is that at the end of the 12 month period, a participating young professional will have enough knowledge, skills and experience:

- to work as a trade advisor to his or her government,
- to work in the field of international trade,
- or to meet the essential competencies that allow the candidate to compete for vacancies at the WTO.

The initial response to this proposal has been very positive, though members have raised questions on a number of points of detail – particularly regarding how the scheme will be funded.

In response to members' requests we will therefore shortly be issuing a paper which sets out the details of the Programme. We will welcome your comments – and any further queries.

There will also be opportunities for further discussion of this Programme through the biennial Technical Assistance plan in due course.

On that basis I would urge members to refrain from commenting on this item today.

Once you have had chance to review the details of the Programme, I hope you will feel able to give it your full support.

In my view it is an important element of our wider efforts to increase diversity and broaden the representation of the Membership within the Secretariat.

Thank you Mr Chairman.