

# WTO WORKSHOP ON TRADE AND PUBLIC HEALTH

## Opening Remarks by DDG Alan Wolff

MONDAY, 11 NOVEMBER 2019, 9:00, ROOM E

Good morning. I would like to welcome you to the WTO Workshop on Trade and Public Health. We are pleased to organize this activity, once again, in close collaboration with the Secretariats of the World Health Organization and the World Intellectual Property Organization.

Today, we are reaching a milestone: 15 years of Trade and Public Health Workshops.

Over these years, this activity has evolved to cover the link between Public Health and the WTO Agreements in an ever more comprehensive and multidisciplinary manner. Almost 500 government officials from developing and least developed countries have been trained so far. They have taken the acquired knowledge back home and shared it with colleagues. And, as we have heard from many of them, this knowledge has assisted them in conceiving and implementing new ways to improve access to health technologies.

Workshops like this one have also triggered requests at the national and regional levels for more focused and tailored technical assistance from the WTO and its sister agencies, based on the integrated and holistic approach we will take during this week.

The importance of health cannot be overstated. [The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals more specifically Goal 3](#), calls upon the international community to "Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages"<sup>1</sup>. This Goal puts the Doha Declaration on the TRIPS Agreement and Public Health as the cornerstone to foster research and development of new medicines and access to affordable medicines. Here at the WTO, we are committed to contribute to this Goal and this Workshop is part of our efforts.

The Doha Declaration on TRIPS and Public Health also initiated what became the first ever amendment to the WTO's multilateral rules. The amendment to the TRIPS Agreement was the result of Members' recognition of the importance of health and access to affordable medicines.

The entry into force of the [Protocol Amending the TRIPS Agreement](#), in January 2017, introduced an additional public health flexibility permanently into WTO rules. The resulting Special Compulsory Licensing System provides a secure legal pathway to ensure access to affordable generic medicines for countries that rely on imports for the treatment of their patients. This remarkable outcome shows how the multilateral rules-based system can respond to global health concerns.

Health is one of the more complex policy environments. It needs a multidisciplinary approach to find practical solutions for continuously evolving challenges. How do we respond to health problems, facilitate access to medicines and medical technologies and, at the same time, foster innovation? Finding answers to such questions requires close collaboration between different players from the public and private sector, as well as academia and civil society. We cannot work in isolation. The need for partnership and cooperation becomes ever more pressing now with the development of cutting-edge health technologies, which are complex and costly, in order to ensure that the benefits of such technologies reach patients all over the world.

The work of the WTO with colleagues from the Secretariats of the World Health Organization and the World Intellectual Property Organization is based on the principles of policy coherence and complementarity. In 2013, the Study on "[Promoting Access to Medical Technologies: Intersections between Public Health, Intellectual Property and Trade](#)" emphasized the need for a holistic approach when working on the interface between health and trade.

The complementarity of the three key organizations working on issues at the crossroad between trade and health should ideally be reflected at the domestic level by the collaboration between different government authorities responsible for health, intellectual property and trade

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<sup>1</sup> Target: Support the research and development of vaccines and medicines for the communicable and noncommunicable diseases that primarily affect developing countries, provide access to affordable essential medicines and vaccines, in accordance with the Doha Declaration on the TRIPS Agreement and Public Health, which affirms the right of developing countries to use to the full the provisions in the Agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights regarding flexibilities to protect public health, and, in particular, provide access to medicines for all.

issues. There will always be different points of view. The beauty of our work is finding practical solutions, which evolve with the needs of each country.

Nowadays, our lives are being rapidly re-shaped by new technologies. Trade is an essential tool to facilitate access to finished medicines, raw materials, machinery, services and new technologies. We all need to work together to find the optimal solutions to tackle diseases, growing populations, scarce resources and climate change. Trade is an important contributor to the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. All countries are dependent to some extent on imports for their needs for medicines and other medical technologies. Therefore, facilitating trade is also part of enhancing access to health.

In the course of this week, you will be exposed to various policy dimensions with an effect on public health and how these relate to trade and other relevant agreements and treaties. Our objective is to ensure that you acquire the tools to analyse and formulate practical and effective policy choices. We also hope that this will be the start of a global network of colleagues interested in health, trade and intellectual property. This will add your names to the already existing group of almost 500 colleagues around the world, who have joined forces to improve public health with the support of trade agreements.

I would like to personally encourage all of you to participate actively, ask questions and share your experiences. Given the breadth of issues to be covered, one week is not enough for a detailed discussion. Therefore, I invite you to regard this Workshop as the beginning of a long journey, during which you will have to continuously deepen your knowledge. We also trust that you will spread the knowledge and collaborative approach with colleagues upon your return to capital. Our door is always open to follow-up with more tailored technical assistance that responds to your specific needs. Do not hesitate to take the opportunity to discuss these needs with my colleagues in the course of this week.

Let me now say a few words regarding participation in this activity, which has attracted more candidates than ever before. In fact, we had a record number of 174 applications this year. You can therefore be proud for having been selected out of this impressive number of well-qualified candidates. I am very pleased to see that we have again succeeded to bring together such an eminent group of experts with different professional backgrounds from all regions of the world. I trust that your contributions will make discussions more captivating, drawing on your own experience on health, trade and intellectual property issues.

I should also mention that you will engage with no less than 32 speakers this week. While this is particularly demanding on the organizers, it ensures your exposure to a wide spectrum of expertise and views, which you will hopefully find enriching.

I would like to thank our colleagues from WHO and WIPO for their continuous collaboration, as well as invited speakers from UNCTAD, delegates from WTO Members, and representatives from the private sector and from civil society. Your contributions make this Workshop meaningful.

A distinctive aspect of this programme is that it draws together WTO expertise from across the Secretariat, rather than limiting the focus to individual WTO Agreements. I am therefore especially grateful to the WTO team, including colleagues from the Intellectual Property, Government Procurement and Competition Division, and colleagues from other Divisions in the WTO Secretariat, who have been closely working together on the organization and delivery of this activity to ensure that it gives you a complete and rounded picture of a complex policy landscape.

I wish you all a fruitful week.

Thank you.

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