

## **DDG Zhang Opening Remarks**

**Thursday 17 February 2022 at 14:00**

Distinguished professors, advisory board members, colleagues,

It is my pleasure to be here addressing you today. I once again welcome all the newly selected WTO Chairs to the programme.

Let me start by saying that I am excited about the expansion of the WCP – and I wish to see the new cohort of Chairs integrate smoothly into the WCP network, which offers great potential both for the WTO and for the Chairs

First, the WTO Secretariat and the WTO Membership collectively, stand to gain **invaluable information on Members' perspectives and the views of domestic stakeholders in beneficiary countries**. In turn, the WTO has insights to developments in trade negotiations and the WTO's regular work, the latest trade data, and gained experience and learned lessons in trade liberalization.

The WCP Network affords opportunities of mutual learning given that the WTO and the Chairs look at the same issues from different perspectives.

Second, for you, the Chairs, the network has established a successful record of "South to South" learning, where - with advice by Academic Board Members - Chairs from different generations of the programme, different disciplines and world regions share experiences and best practices on how to generate applied research reaching out to policy makers. The Director-

General places great importance on this approach as an integral part of the WTO's Technical Assistance activities.

The WTO views trade topics through a multilateral policy-oriented perspective, while Chairs add multi-faceted science-based and empirical perspectives on the ground in several dozen countries in different world regions. This generates synergies because the WCP enables Chairs to better understand the nuances of the WTO system while the WTO Membership collectively and the WTO Secretariat - which lacks regional and country offices - can draw on the applied research and suggestions of the Chairs to complement and support their work.

**The programme is thus a win-win Network for all stakeholders involved.** Now, with the addition of 17 new Chairs to it, I also encourage you to focus on ensuring that this Network is enhanced. Let me make five brief points in this regard:

- First, let me convey to you today the Director General's strong support for this programme coordinated by the Knowledge Management Division.
- Second, we are looking forward to in person events when the pandemic allows, in particular the Annual Meetings hosted by the WTO. I consider this an indispensable part of the programme. It will create stronger relationships among the Chairs and the Academic Advisory Board. We are considering a physical meeting in June, but this depends on the new date of MC12 that is yet to be set and on the evolution of the pandemic.
- Third, I cannot stress enough the importance of the individual meetings which you will have with the WCP team and Board this

month and the next. They are important opportunities to refine your projects with their experience and expertise. WTO Members and donors require us to have thorough monitoring and evaluation system in place and aligning work and budget plans to match benchmarks of the TA plan will be extremely important to obtain individually and collectively positive evaluations and feedback. Reporting is thus vital to the programme and is a necessary part of each Chair's activities.

- Fourth, for the flourishing of the WCP network close interaction and collaboration of WTO Chairs from previous phases and the new Chairs is key. Last year's funded projects have yielded large amounts of high-quality outputs on many topical issues of interest to the WTO Members at capitals and in Geneva, and we're planning also this year to make available funding for projects involving Chairs of the first and second cohort of the programme.
- Finally, following the DG's decision to admit new Chairs to the programme on a rolling basis the network will grow and establish links with policy makers in even more developed and least developed countries.

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I am looking forward to following the projects and activities of this next cycle of the Chairs programme and see the new cohort of Chairs provide applied research and advice to governmental and other stakeholders and establish links with WTO missions with a view to contributing to the ongoing WTO discussions on topics such as fisheries subsidies, trade and public health, economic resilience during the pandemic and post-pandemic recovery, participating in or re-establishing global and regional supply chains, and many other subjects discussed in negotiations and initiatives

launched or the WTO's regular work activities. We anticipate that on future points of interest such as green trade, circular economy, climate change, digital trade, trade and gender, and MSMEs, **the WTO and Members can draw on your research results and your experience to feed into the negotiating process.**

In the upcoming sessions, the new Chairs will present the broad elements of their research activities. **I encourage you to take this time to identify key areas for such collaboration among Chairs and with stakeholders.**

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I will end by saying that the Chairs programme represents an area of stability and promise for the future of this organization and its Members.

**I am fully aware that the cooperation which will be built among you will spill over into the negotiations at the WTO this year and in those to come,** because at its root, **the WCP is about partnerships** – both vertical and horizontal – spanning all strata of society and making trade work in real and tangible ways for the people of each member, as it always should.

**Thank you!**