



**12th WTO MINISTERIAL
CONFERENCE**
GENEVA 2022
CO-HOSTED BY KAZAKHSTAN



MC12
GENEVA
2022

2ND MINISTERIAL MEETING OF THE g7+ WTO ACCESSIONS GROUP

**STATEMENT BY HON. MAWINE G. DIGGS, MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY OF LIBERIA
AND CO-COORDINATOR OF THE g7+ WTO ACCESSIONS GROUP**

12 June 2022, 08:00, Room D/Zoom

1. Dear Excellencies, Honourable Ministers, good morning. It gives me great pleasure to open the 2nd Ministerial Meeting of the g7+ WTO Accessions Group on the margins of the 12th WTO Ministerial Conference. As many of you know me already, my name is Mawine G. Diggs, the Minister of Commerce and Industry of Liberia. Together with my distinguished colleague Mr Joaquim Amaral, Coordinating Minister of Economic Affairs of Timor-Leste, we have the pleasure of co-coordinating this Group.

2. We would like to start by warmly welcoming distinguished Ministers and delegates here in the Room and connected virtually, including from capitals. Today, we are also joined by the distinguished Ministers and Ambassadors – representatives of other WTO Members and acceding governments, including from the larger g7+ association, represented by H.E. Dr Francis Mustapha Kai-Kai, Minister of Planning and Economic Development of Sierra Leone and Chair of the g7+ who is joining us from Freetown. Thank you all for being with us despite this early hour. Your presence is a testament of the importance and relevance of the trade for peace agenda that the Group and its supporters have been promoting for the multilateral trading system.

3. I have also been informed that the WTO Deputy Director-General Zhang Xiangchen was unable to join us this morning due to another urgent Ministerial meeting. He thanks the Group for the invitation and looks forward to engaging with the Group on the next occasion. His statement will be read by Maika Oshikawa, Director of the WTO Accessions Division. Maika, thank you.

4. Before I invite Minister Amaral to intervene, let me provide a brief background to our meeting today. Participants will recall that our Group was inaugurated in December 2017, during the 11th WTO Ministerial Conference in Buenos Aires, Argentina. It is important to note that our Group is a sub-group of the larger g7+ association of 20 fragile and conflict-affected states, which was formed in 2010 with the aim to forge pathways out of fragility and achieve resilience, and this is why the Chair of the Group is here with us today. Inspired by this vision, eight LDCs associated with WTO accessions came together during the last Ministerial Conference and formed the g7+ WTO Accessions Group, united in their goal to use WTO membership as a tool to achieve peace and stability. The Ministers of the Group issued their First Declaration, which was circulated to the 11th WTO Ministerial Conference in Buenos Aires, in document WT/MIN(17)/51.

5. Since its inauguration, the Group has advocated the integration of fragile and conflict-affected states (FCS) into the multilateral trading system, in particular through their accessions, and more specifically, the Trade for Peace agenda in the WTO, – with the support of the WTO and the g7+ Secretariats. Special thanks go to former WTO Director-General Alan Wm. Wolff who supported the Group's establishment and the earlier phase of the Trade for Peace Initiative, and DDG Zhang who succeeded Mr. Wolff's efforts, and of course, Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, a strong advocate of the use of trade for the creation of economic opportunities for the most vulnerable. The Group's vision could not have been realised without the g7+ Secretariat, which happens to be based in Dili, and especially General Secretary Dr Helder Da Costa and his Deputy Habib Mayar, who have been a constant source of knowledge and perspective.

6. As we have now gathered for the 12th WTO Ministerial Conference, I believe that the time has now come for the Group to set its vision for the next stage of our work. The global challenges that we have faced in the recent years have been unprecedented. Having gone through the devastating experiences of violent conflict, struggling with fragility constraints, FCS governments remain one of the most disadvantaged in this building. We urgently need effective support in accessing the international trade tools provided by the WTO, for the benefit of our people.

7. Let me share the example of my country. Having emerged after years of civil wars and the strike of Ebola, Liberia had to unite as one nation seeking for peace and sustainable development. We opened up and sought speedy integration into the global economy, using it as an instrument for much needed domestic reforms, better governance and transformation as part of our nation-building strategy and Vision 2030. This vision, which was set by Hon. former President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf and now carried over by Hon. President George Manneh Weah, allowed for Liberia to move towards re-claiming its place, regionally and globally, and building stronger society, for a brighter future.

8. But transforming from one of the world's poorest into a middle-income economy is a formidable undertaking – especially for a nation in which civil war is a painful memory. Liberia's accession to the WTO in July 2016, together with that of Afghanistan, was only the start of our journey. Last year, as we celebrated our 5-year membership anniversary and reflected on our participation in the WTO, we realised that the effective usage of WTO instruments has become even more critical, especially after Liberia was drastically affected by reduced global prices for several of its main exports and the global market downturn. We need to focus on building capacity within the Government and public-private dialogue.

9. Let me add how fragile peace can be for many of us, and how narrow can be the "window opportunity" for trade integration. For some of us, like Afghanistan which cannot be present in this room, or Yemen which is also facing a serious humanitarian situation, the Trade for Peace Initiative becomes even more relevant today.

10. It is with this thinking in mind, on behalf of the Group, I appealed to the WTO membership to develop a dedicated Work Programme on Trade for Peace for FCS, so that our specific challenges and needs can be effectively addressed through various pillars of the WTO work. Such programme would be essential for the multilateral trading system to be more inclusive, sensitive and responsive to the most vulnerable population. The Group's proposal was circulated in WTO document WT/GC/W/830, on 20 October 2021.

11. This proposal has brought the concept of FCS to the WTO for the first time, which the Group should be proud of. Over the past years, the Group has been the driving force for making the case for FCS, which is now embraced by a greater number of FCS beyond the g7+ Group, whether they are WTO Members or Observers. While no agreement could be reached on the proposal before MC12, I trust that the Group will be ready to proactively pursue this through consultations in WTO Committees and bodies, with a view to a concrete outcome at the 13th WTO Ministerial Conference.

12. In the meantime, our experts have worked on the draft Declaration which has been circulated to all participants together with the invitations to this meeting. The draft Declaration is open to all interested delegations who may wish to join. The latest version of the Declaration is available in the back of the room and in Zoom for virtual participants. We invite all participants to intervene and make comments before the adoption of the Declaration.
