Foreword by Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala

The idea for this book began to take shape during an official visit I made to Uruguay in May 2024.

In Montevideo, I had the pleasure to mark the 30th anniversary of the conclusion of the Uruguay Round with some of the people who played a direct role in those historic negotiations.

At a lunch hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I was honoured to sit next to two officials who played central roles both in launching the Round and bringing it to a successful close: Sergio Abreu, now Secretary General of the Latin American Integration Association (ALADI) and former chair of the GATT Trade Negotiations Committee, and Ricardo Zerbino, Uruguay's Minister of the Economy from 1985 to 1990.

At the end of the lunch, I asked for a photo with them to demonstrate the gratitude we owe to those whose tireless work helped build a more open and predictable global economy, which during subsequent decades would enable unprecedented improvements in human well-being.

The same day, I was invited as a special guest to a session of the ALADI Committee of Representatives, attended by ambassadors from member countries. Just before the session got under way, Sergio Abreu invited me into his office, where he showed me the gavel he used to officially close the Uruguay Round.

As he notes in this book, that strike of the gavel was the culmination of many years of cooperation and negotiation that led to the transformation of the multilateral trading system and the establishment of the comprehensive set of trade rules that still govern world trade today. It also led, of course, to the birth of the World Trade Organization just a few months later.

During my visit, I was also delighted to meet with another contributor to this book, María Cassarino, now Advisor to the Secretary General of ALADI. In 1991, she joined the Uruguayan mission to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in Geneva as Third Secretary in the team led by Ambassador Julio Lacarte Muró, a legendary figure in the evolution of the GATT/WTO system.



DG Okonjo-Iweala with Ricardo Zerbino (left - former Minister of the Economy of Uruguay) and Sergio Abreu (former Foreign Minister of Uruguay) at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Montevideo in May 2024.



DG Okonjo Iweala holding the gavel used to officially close the Uruguay Round, with María Cassarino (former Second Secretary of Uruguay) and Sergio Abreu (former Foreign Minister of Uruguay), in the latter's office in Montevideo in May 2024.

Over the course of these conversations, I began to wonder about the back story to these negotiations, as I heard many interesting stories and reflections that may not have been captured in the numerous scholarly and other works on the Uruguay Round. This volume is an attempt to ensure that some of these rich reflections are not lost.

Throughout my time in Montevideo, I got a strong sense of the pride Uruguayans feel that their country's name is forever associated with the largest trade negotiation ever, and most probably the largest negotiation of any kind in history. The negotiations that bear their name covered everything from toothbrushes to pleasure boats and expanded trade rules into new areas, such as banking, telecommunications and intellectual property rights. The round also created a binding dispute settlement system.

It is no coincidence, therefore, that Uruguay accounts for many of the recollections in this commemorative publication. Particular thanks are due to Enrique Iglesias, formerly Uruguay's Minister of Foreign Trade, who presided over the ministerial meeting that launched the Uruguay Round in Punta del Este in September 1986. His memories of that decisive meeting, soon to mark its 40th anniversary, are particularly poignant against the backdrop of the current disruptions in global trade.

I also wish to honour the memory of Ambassador Carlos Pérez del Castillo, who passed away recently. Just a few months earlier, he left us a thoughtful and richly detailed reflection on the Round's agricultural negotiations, drawing on his role at the time as Director General of Economic Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

I am hugely grateful to everyone who has contributed to this publication, which includes a wide variety of regional perspectives on the evolution and conclusion of the Round, encompassing the recollections of participants from all continents. I hope you enjoy reading their contributions as much as I have. I must say that I learned a lot and gained some insights into the ongoing issues that the WTO confronts today.



Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala
Director-General