

Spotlight:

High-level event on trade and environment

The WTO and UN Environment hosted in October a leadership dialogue on environmental and trade policies and released a joint publication – “Making Trade Work for the Environment, Prosperity and Resilience”.

Leaders from business, government and civil society participated in the high-level event, held during the WTO’s Public Forum (see page 150). Panellists called on the WTO to expand the contribution of trade to sustainability and prosperity. They urged stepped-up action to deliver pro-environment and pro-trade outcomes that help achieve the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals. Trade policies need to support environmentally friendly technologies, such as those needed for renewable energy, they said.

The high-level event, along with the joint publication and a sustainability exhibition, also held at the Public Forum, were the first results of a WTO-UN Environment initiative launched by WTO Director-General Roberto Azevêdo and then UN Environment Executive Director Erik Solheim in January 2018 to identify ways of ensuring that trade and environment policies are mutually supportive.

DG Azevêdo said: “A healthy environment is essential to building prosperous and resilient economies. This is one key reason why we need to bring the trade and environmental agendas closer together. [...] Trade is a powerful tool to make green technologies more affordable and to help sustainable business expand. I look forward to continuing working alongside all stakeholders, including the private sector, to ensure that trade delivers benefits for people and the environment everywhere”.

Erik Solheim noted that trade can unlock triple-win opportunities by creating jobs, improving well-being and resource efficiency, and accelerating the dissemination of goods and services needed to protect the environment.

In addition to the two heads of agencies, the high-level panel was composed of: Bertrand Piccard, Initiator and Chairman, Solar Impulse Foundation; Kimmo Tiilikainen, Minister of the Environment, Energy and Housing, Finland; Lucia Bakulumpagi-Wamala, CEO and Founder, Bakulu Power, Uganda; Aisa Mijeno, Co-founder and CEO, SALt (Sustainable Alternative Lighting), the Philippines; and Jérôme Péresse, CEO, GE Renewable Energy.

Noting that “protection of the environment is profitable”, Bertrand Piccard highlighted the role that the WTO can play in supporting the dissemination of profitable, clean and efficient technologies. These need to be better known, brought to market and implemented widely, he said.

Aisa Mijeno said her company is exploring the possibility of extracting hard-to-source materials from scrap circuit boards. Both Lucia Bakulumpagi-Wamala and Jérôme Péresse stressed the importance of free and open trade for renewable energy technologies. Kimmo Tiilikainen called for putting more focus on the circular economy and making environmental alternatives more viable. The discussion also emphasized the wide scope governments have under WTO rules to implement sound regulations that protect the environment.

The WTO Secretariat and UN Environment co-publication, launched at the high level event, examines the interplay between trade and the environment and details how governments can work together to ensure that trade and a healthy environment reinforce each other. Key messages and proposed actions include:

- increasing collaborative work on strengthening multilateral cooperation and governance
- fostering private-public partnerships to facilitate market-oriented approaches that allow trade and environment to be mutually supportive





- encouraging national policy makers to work together across environment and trade domains
- fostering “win-win” opportunities which provide economic and environmental benefits
- supporting decision makers from the world's poorest countries, along with vulnerable groups and under-represented communities, in preserving natural assets
- delivering inclusive, gender-sensitive outcomes for environmental and trade policy to support broader goals within the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda
- raising awareness among stakeholders on the role of trade in environmental sustainability and resilience to climate change.

In the sustainability exhibition, the WTO partnered with the Climate Show, Solar Impulse Foundation, the Permanent Mission of Japan, UN Environment and WIPO GREEN to present 12 exhibitors, who showcased a wide range

of innovative and sustainable technological solutions. These ranged from agro-waste valorization (recycling), energy storage solutions and salt-water lighting to water-treatment systems and a fully recyclable electric race car.

On the margins of the high-level event, several delegations organized Public Forum sessions on sustainability and trade. They included sessions on the “blue economy” (sustainable use of the oceans) (Norway), the circular low-carbon economy (Costa Rica and Finland), trade and climate change (Canada and France) and a session on fossil fuel subsidy reform organized by the Friends of Fossil Fuel Subsidy Reform. The WTO also launched its new online environmental database (see page 95).

The next phase of the joint initiative between the WTO and UN Environment will comprise a series of regional activities to discuss with stakeholders the issues raised in the joint publication and high-level event.