

## Spotlight: Trade Dialogues

**In June, the WTO facilitated a second “Trade Dialogue” at the WTO’s headquarters, bringing together over 60 senior business representatives to discuss trade-related issues and challenges. Their recommendations on strengthening global trade were presented in October during the WTO Public Forum.**

Hosted at the request of the private sector, the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) and B20 Argentina, the business arm of the G20, the one-day meeting drew participants from small and large enterprises, from developed, developing and least-developed countries and a variety of sectors.

The discussions, which continued beyond the June meeting, resulted in a series of recommendations on how to reinforce global trade and investment in support of inclusive growth and development, together with a declaration of support for the WTO. The main topics – sustainable development, e-commerce, investment facilitation, and micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) – stemmed from priorities identified at the Business Forum held in December 2017 alongside the WTO’s 11<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference in Buenos Aires.

Business representatives sent a strong message of support for the WTO and the rules-based multilateral trading system, stressing its role in creating economic stability and supporting growth, development and job creation. Participants at the Trade Dialogues event

highlighted the negative impact of protectionism and called for businesses to speak up for an open, rules-based trading system.

DG Azevêdo addressed the opening session. “The level of engagement from the private sector in the WTO keeps rising, and I think that today’s event will provide real food for thought for WTO members as they take forward their work. I also heard a strong desire from business to keep this conversation going and to keep building this constructive partnership,” he said.

The first “Trade Dialogue” was held in 2016. The initiative aims to bring together a wide range of stakeholders, including labour organizations, consumer bodies, business and academics, to discuss trade concerns.

The opening session of the 7 June 2018 event was followed by four break-out sessions where participants engaged in small groups on the main topics identified by the business community as priorities. Business representatives also heard updates on the work conducted at the WTO in these areas since the Ministerial Conference.



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The sessions were chaired by four “discussion leaders”:

- Sunil Bharti Mittal, former ICC Chairman
- Paul Polman, ICC Chairman
- Daniel Funes de Rioja, B20 Chair
- Fernando Landa, B20 Policy Sherpa

At the final session, the discussion leaders and other participants presented the main messages from the working sessions to WTO members. DG Azevêdo and the Chair of the WTO General Council, Ambassador Junichi Ihara (Japan), also attended.

Mr Polman told the final session: “Governments are increasingly making plans to align global trading policies with national development approaches, to accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. It is critical that new forms of innovation and cooperation continue to be explored, amongst business, government and multilateral institutions. That is why dialogues – such as today’s – are necessary.”

The Trade Dialogue participants used the Public Forum in October (see page 150) to share their recommendations with a wider audience. On 2 October, a public session was held by the ICC and the B20 Argentina, where the chairs of the four groups outlined their recommendations.

Business representatives reaffirmed their “strong support for the WTO” and stressed that the “stability, predictability and transparency” provided by the multilateral trading system are crucial for

supporting growth, development and job creation. They underlined the need for ongoing multilateral negotiations and discussions at the WTO to ensure the system “remains responsive and well-equipped” to deal with trade-related and other modern, global economic issues.

DG Azevêdo told the session that it is vital that business “engage with governments directly, and with other stakeholders who also inform WTO members’ positions. This must be a constant process.”

The business recommendations included a call for a common and inclusive approach on a coherent regulatory framework for e-commerce and for the WTO to lead the way in aligning best regulatory practices to facilitate trade and investment. “The business community strongly supports the Joint Initiative on Investment Facilitation at the WTO, and stands ready to contribute to the development of a multilateral framework to facilitate investments.”

On sustainable development, business leaders said they support ongoing WTO work on fisheries subsidies and agriculture as well as initiatives on environmental goods and services. “Business stands ready to actively participate to help finding appropriate and workable outcomes on these issues,” the recommendations said. On MSMEs, the recommendations recognized the progress made through the Joint Initiative on MSMEs (see page 51) and encouraged increased dialogue on trade between governments and the private sector.