



## Key events since start of mandate

**15 Feb:** General Council selects Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala as the WTO's seventh Director-General.

**1 Mar:** On first day in office, DG calls on WTO members to adopt a "change of approach" to deliver results.

**15-17 Mar:** DG makes official visit to Nigeria, meets President Muhammadu Buhari and senior members of the government.

**23 Mar:** DG is joined by heads of WHO, IMF, World Bank, OECD, UNCTAD at Aid for Trade stocktaking event.

**31 Mar:** DG announces the WTO's 2021 trade forecast.

**31 Mar:** DG addresses G7 trade ministers.

**1 Apr:** DG establishes Delivery Unit to coordinate efforts to reach outcomes at 12th Ministerial Conference.

**9 Apr:** DG attends World Bank-IMF spring meetings in Washington DC.

**14 Apr:** DG calls "vaccine summit" with WTO members, vaccine manufacturers, international organizations to address vaccine inequity.

**26 Apr:** On EU Trade Policy Day, DG discusses WTO reform with Valdis Dombrovskis, European Commissioner for Trade.

**29 Apr:** DG participates in videoconference with German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

**4 May:** DG announces her four Deputy Directors-General: Angela Ellard (United States), Anabel González (Costa Rica), Jean-Marie Paugam (France), Xiangchen Zhang (China).

**10 May:** DG meets with Italy's Prime Minister Mario Draghi and senior members of the government in Rome to discuss global response to COVID-19.

**18 May:** DG participates in Summit on the Financing of African Economies in Paris, convened by French President Emmanuel Macron, attended by African heads of state, heads of international organizations and EU leaders.

## MESSAGE FROM

# Message from Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala

As I write these words, the world continues to grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic and its devastating health and economic consequences. Close to 4 million people have already lost their lives. Millions more have lost livelihoods, or had their education interrupted. Even as vaccine production and roll-out gathers speed, the supply of doses remains far below what is needed. Poorer countries are being left behind in vaccine access and economic prospects. People are dying even though the means exist to save them.

When 2020 started, we had barely heard of the novel coronavirus, and had no inkling of the impact it would go on to have on people's lives and the global economy.

The pandemic has had major effects on global trade – and on the day-to-day work of the WTO, which is the subject of this annual report. The multilateral trading system has played an important part in efforts to fight COVID-19, and I am convinced that the WTO can and must do more.

In late 2019, WTO economists were projecting 2.7% growth for world merchandise trade in 2020 – modest by historical standards, due in part to protectionist measures and continuing tensions around trade policy. By March and April 2020, much of the global economy had come to a sudden stop, amid the large-scale implementation of business closures, travel restrictions, and social distancing measures necessary to curb the spread of COVID-19. Trade went into free fall.

In the second quarter of 2020, the volume of world merchandise trade shrank 15% year-on-year, the steepest

drop on record. But in the second half of the year, as lockdowns began to ease, trade rebounded strongly, propelled by demand resulting from extraordinary levels of fiscal and monetary support, particularly in advanced economies, as well as the containment of the pandemic's impact in several Asian countries. Restraint in the use of trade protectionism was another important factor in the trade rebound: policies did not prevent supply chains from restarting operations. Ultimately, for 2020 as a whole, merchandise trade would go on to decline by 5.3% in volume terms, and 7.6% in value – a severe contraction, to be sure, but smaller than that seen in 2009, during the global financial crisis.

Importantly, trade's resilience represented a lifeline for millions, enabling access to food and other essential supplies. Despite some initial disruptions, the value of trade in medical products rose by 16%, and trade in personal protective equipment expanded by 50%. Agriculture trade was relatively unhindered, which meant vital food supplies continued to move around the world, including to net food-importing developing countries. As trade has picked up again, there have been supply shortages, logistics bottlenecks, and price spikes, but all would have been vastly more disruptive had businesses and households been compelled to look for domestic alternatives to imported products.

In Geneva, the WTO had to suspend in-person gatherings in March and April. Negotiations, regular committee meetings, and other discussions subsequently resumed in virtual and hybrid formats, in line with the health authorities' recommendations. The



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Twelfth Ministerial Conference (MC12), originally scheduled for June 2020 in Kazakhstan, was postponed, and is now set to be held in Geneva from 30 November to 3 December 2021.

The WTO stepped up its longstanding monitoring work to shed light on trade measures governments were introducing in response to the pandemic, including an early spate of export restrictions on medical products. The analysis revealed that

many of the trade restricting measures were unwound, though too many still persist. Perhaps surprisingly, measures seeking to facilitate trade were more numerous and covered more traded merchandise, by value, than the new restrictions – US\$ 225 billion compared to US\$ 180 billion. The information on trade measures was published on a new area of the WTO website dedicated to the COVID-19 pandemic, along with members' proposals related to the pandemic,



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**19 May:** DG meets EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and President of European Council Charles Michel in Brussels to discuss vaccine equity and role of trade in combating the pandemic.

**21 May:** DG addresses G20 leaders at Global Health Summit on vaccine inequity.

**26 May:** DG delivers address at graduation ceremony for Class of 2021 of Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies.

**31 May:** DG meets with Kazakhstan President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev to discuss Kazakhstan's chairmanship of 12th Ministerial Conference.

**1 Jun:** DG joins leaders of IMF, World Bank, WHO in call for US\$ 50 billion investment in health, trade, finance to end pandemic.

**2 Jun:** DG meets CARICOM Secretary-General Irwin LaRocque, addresses CARICOM Council for Trade and Economic Development.

**5 Jun:** On World Environment Day, DG calls for sustainable trade to protect environment and ensure inclusiveness.

**5 Jun:** DG addresses meeting of APEC Ministers Responsible for Trade.

**7 Jun:** DG welcomes President Kersti Kaljulaid of Estonia to WTO.

**8 Jun:** On World Ocean Day, DG calls on WTO members to conclude agreement on curbing harmful fishing subsidies.

**9 Jun:** DG welcomes Tunisia's Head of Government, Hichem Mechichi, to WTO.

**9 Jun:** DG participates in Africa Roundtable with President Steinmeier (Germany) and President Macky Sall (Senegal).

**11 Jun:** DG discusses trade issues with prime ministers and ministers of Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States.

**12 Jun:** DG addresses G7 leaders at summit hosted by the United Kingdom.

and a series of papers by WTO Secretariat officials looking into different aspects of the pandemic's impact on global trade.

Other aspects of WTO work continued despite COVID-19 restrictions. Eleven dispute settlement reports and decisions were circulated in 2020, including a long-awaited report on tobacco plain packaging. However, the system's appeals function remained blocked.

Echoing trends in the wider economy, the pandemic accelerated the move online for the WTO's training programmes for government officials from developing countries. In 2020, over 13,500 participants benefited from these activities, including new e-learning courses. The WTO also continued to support multi-agency programmes, such as the Enhanced Integrated Framework, a provider of policy diagnostics and targeted funding to least-developed countries. In addition, our Aid for Trade work programme was adapted to reflect the economic impact of COVID-19 and to respond to members' needs.

Looking ahead to 2021, the WTO can and must play a critical role in accelerating COVID-19 vaccine production and in ensuring a strong, sustained, and inclusive global economic recovery. To live up to its founding objectives of using trade to help people – to raise living standards,

create jobs, and promote sustainable development – the WTO must deliver results this year. By responding together to a global crisis without precedent in our lifetimes, members can begin to rebuild the trust needed to address future challenges.

Between now and MC12, WTO members can contribute to vaccine equity by freeing up vaccine supply chains and improving access to raw materials, working with manufacturers to increase production volumes and investment in new manufacturing capacity in developing countries, and finding pragmatic solutions to questions of technology transfer, know-how, and intellectual property, including the proposed TRIPS waiver.

Another key deliverable for 2021 is a long-awaited agreement on curbing harmful fisheries subsidies. This will be critical for marine sustainability and for the WTO's credibility as a negotiating forum – one where members are capable of jointly addressing problems of the global commons.

For many members, a successful MC12 will have to include meaningful outcomes on agriculture. By building on their discussions over the past year on public stockholding, export restrictions for humanitarian purchases by the World Food Programme, transparency, and domestic support, members can bolster food security, enhance predictability around applied tariffs,



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and lay a foundation for subsequent work to reduce distortions in agricultural production and trade.

Finding a path forward on dispute settlement will be necessary to place rule-making at the WTO on a firmer footing. I hope that members will be able to agree this year at least on the contours of the changes they wish to see in how the system operates.

And finally, groups of WTO members have made substantial progress in areas such as investment facilitation, e-commerce, and services domestic regulation, as well as on empowering women and small businesses in the global economy. Two new initiatives on trade and environmental sustainability were launched last year, one looking at a wide range of issues including climate change, and the other focused on plastics pollution. Participating members can use these initiatives to agree on rules where international

frameworks are currently weak or absent, and to harness the power of trade for environmental sustainability and greater social inclusion.

On a personal note, I would like to thank WTO members for appointing me to serve as the seventh Director-General of this institution. I am honoured by the trust you have placed in me, and will continue to do my utmost to help members reform and revitalize the WTO, and ensure that it continues to deliver for people around the world.

**DR. NGOZI OKONJO-IWEALA**  
DIRECTOR-GENERAL