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What we stand for

Harvesting tea leaves near Nuwara Eliya, Sri Lanka.

Overview

Improving people's lives

The fundamental goal of the WTO is to improve the welfare of people around the world. The WTO's founding Agreement recognizes that trade should be conducted with a view to raising standards of living, ensuring full employment and increasing real income.

Opening trade

The WTO seeks to ensure that trade flows as smoothly, predictably and freely as possible, such as by lowering trade barriers, including customs duties – or tariffs – and measures such as import bans.



Partnerships

The WTO maintains regular dialogue with civil society, labour unions, universities, the business community and other intergovernmental organizations to enhance cooperation and build partnerships.

Protection of the environment

Protection and preservation of the environment are fundamental goals of the WTO. The WTO agreements permit members to take measures to protect public, animal and plant health and the environment.

Support for less developed economies

Over three-quarters of WTO members are developing economies. The WTO agreements give them transition periods to adjust to WTO provisions and, in certain cases, provide for practical support for implementation of the agreement.

Predictability and transparency

Foreign companies, investors and governments should be confident that trade barriers will not be raised arbitrarily. With stability and predictability provided by WTO rules, investment is encouraged, jobs are created and consumers can enjoy the benefits of competition, such as lower prices.

Inclusive trade

The WTO seeks to build a more inclusive trading system to allow more women and small businesses to participate in global trade. It also recognizes the importance of addressing the digital divide so that more economies can benefit from the digital economy.

Fair competition

"Unfair" practices, such as export subsidies and dumping products at below normal value to gain market share, are discouraged. WTO rules try to establish what is fair or unfair and how governments can respond.

Non-discrimination

Under WTO rules, a WTO member should not discriminate between its trading partners, and should not discriminate between its own and foreign products, services or citizens.

30 years of the WTO

The WTO began life on 1 January 1995, succeeding the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) which had regulated world trade since 1948. Over the past 30 years, the WTO has been instrumental in strengthening the global economy, helping its members to use trade to improve living standards, create jobs and support sustainable development. The timeline below looks back at some of the WTO's achievements across 14 ministerial conferences.



The WTO is born on 1 January 1995.

2nd Ministerial Conference

18-20 May

Geneva, Switzerland

Conference marks 50 years of the GATT, bringing together world leaders to debate achievements and challenges of the multilateral trading system.

5th Ministerial Conference

10-14 September

Cancún, Mexico

WTO welcomes Cambodia and Nepal as first LDCs to join organization since its establishment.

1995

1996

1998

1999

2001

2003

2005

WTO holds first Ministerial Conference

9-13 December

Singapore

Ministerial Declaration renews commitment of WTO to "sustainable growth and development for the common good".

4th Ministerial Conference

9-13 November

Doha, Qatar

Ministers launch new round of trade negotiations – the Doha Development Agenda.

3rd Ministerial Conference

30 November – 3 December

Seattle, United States

Ministers reaffirm central role of rules-based trading system despite breakdown in negotiations amid public protests.

6th Ministerial Conference

13-18 December

Hong Kong, China

Ministers launch Aid for Trade initiative aimed at boosting growth in developing economies.

