



INTRODUCTORY REMARKS BY AMB. AMINA MOHAMED AT THE GENERAL COUNCIL MEETING ON 16 JULY 2020

Mr. Chairman, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,
(Monsieur le President, Excellences, Mesdames et
Messieurs) - optional

1. Let me first of all express my solidarity and support to all the people you represent as they work to manage and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences. I reach out particularly to those who have lost loved ones and friends.
2. It is an honour and a pleasure to be back in the WTO with you today and to be meeting with the Members. I know that for many of you dialing in, this virtual meeting format is a challenge, but I am grateful to

those who have worked to make it possible. I would also like to take this opportunity to recognize the outgoing WTO Director-General Roberto Azevedo for all of his hard work over the past seven years.

3. I am here to talk to you about how I would like to contribute to the WTO as Director General and, equally importantly, to listen to you and respond to your questions.

4. Let me start by setting out the three main themes of my vision for the WTO: Reform, Recovery, Renewal. The WTO needs urgent reforms so it can once again play its full part as an engine of growth, development and stability. Reform is all the more urgent because an effective WTO is needed to help create the conditions for a sustainable recovery from the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic. And looking further ahead, the WTO needs to renew its

capacity to negotiate and to develop new trade rules and disciplines for the challenges of the very near future.

5. Let's reaffirm a basic truth. The WTO is the indispensable backbone of international trade cooperation. Imagine a world without it. All economies would suffer, even the largest.

6. This vital system is being tested as never before. The WTO was already in difficulties before COVID-19 struck. Its negotiating function had faltered, with only limited successes in the last twenty-five years, despite the launch of the Doha Round of negotiations at the beginning of the century. Trade tensions have increased and the dispute settlement system has been compromised. There is widespread acknowledgment among WTO Members that the WTO is in need of urgent reform.

7. Now, COVID-19 is likely to trigger the most severe economic contraction since the Great Depression. No country is in a position to manage the COVID-19 crisis alone. That holds particularly true for trade, which is forecast to contract by as much as one-third in the worst-case scenario. History tells us how the stifling of trade through protectionist reactions made the Great Depression of the 1930s last longer and cut deeper. The GATT and subsequently the WTO were established precisely to prevent such mutually destructive behaviour.
8. It is our duty to make sure that the multilateral trading system is allowed to do the work for which it was established. Over the years since the founding of GATT, many more Members have joined the ranks of the multilateral trading system. Not only are there more of us, but we work today in a much more

complex and integrated world economy. That intensified interdependence makes effective cooperation more vital than ever before.

9. We need to recapture the visionary inspiration of the original architects of the system. Governments must breathe new life into the WTO so it can play a key role in helping recovery from the crisis and in rebuilding economic resilience. Reviving trade is essential to recovery worldwide, to boosting growth and sustainable development, and to easing the social and economic impact of the crisis.

10. Once recovery is under way, however, we will still face the need to update the trading system to take account of crucial global issues, issues like climate change, the digital revolution, poverty and sustainable development. The WTO should be where governments come together to co-operate on

formulating the best trade policy responses, sharing best practices, and reaffirming key principles.

11. We need to reform the WTO to ensure that it makes a positive contribution to the global economy and to the development of its Members, that it supports our shared environmental objectives as we seek to build a sustainable world. The WTO can help to promote sustainable value chains, and encourage the diffusion and adoption of the latest environmental technologies. In short, the WTO must ensure that sustainability is a core consideration in its future work.

12. You do not all share the same reform priorities. This makes it essential to work together for convergence around elements that all can support. We need to break the cycle of despair and enter into a new phase of hope and realism.

13. Renewal has to start with facing up to the defects that have weakened the system in recent years: the inability to update rules to reflect the changing realities of how trade is conducted; the sterility of ideological standoffs; the retreat into defensiveness; and the sense of the benefits of trade not being equitably shared.
14. The WTO has to engage again in good faith negotiations, and this means openness to change and to new ideas, within a culture of inclusiveness and transparency.
15. Renewal should also build upon the WTO's core values and achievements. Trade has been transformational. It has helped to lift close to 1 billion people out of poverty and facilitated the attainment of higher living standards in countries at all levels of development. These successes were possible

because Members did not see trade as a zero-sum game. They understood that trade-offs were needed to produce outcomes. All Members should contribute to trade opening and facilitation efforts, especially those most in a position to do so.

16. Bilateral and regional trade agreements can bring important benefits, especially where localized interests relevant to near neighbours are at stake. The African Continental Free Trade Area, for example, will not only foster new trading opportunities, it will also play a valuable role in improving infrastructure and bringing the continent together. But a trading world of overlapping preferential arrangements among subsets of economies, of which there are over 300, cannot be a substitute for the rules-based multilateral trading system.

17. The WTO's dispute settlement function is key to the credibility and effectiveness of the rules. We need to find a way through its problems to make it once again an instrument that all Members can use with confidence.
18. We need a WTO that is fair and equitable, taking into account the level of economic development of each member. All WTO Members must be prepared to contribute to improving and strengthening the organization, so that it can facilitate trade for the benefit of all, and contribute to economic recovery from the effects of the pandemic.
19. The rules are the backbone of the system, but the multilateral trading system is more than just a rulebook. It is also the regular meetings of the delegates and representatives of each Member who come together to resolve trade tensions and

disputes. It is the transparency and monitoring of trade developments around the world. It is the support provided through technical assistance for developing countries, including the least-developed ones, that boosts their opportunities to participate in international trade.

It is our national legislators who determine the way in which each Member implements and administers its WTO obligations. It is the broad stakeholder community, from business to non-governmental organizations.

It is also part of a community of intergovernmental institutions responsible for an array of economic, social, political and environmental issues clearly related to trade. We need to encourage all these institutions to cooperate closely in delivering their mandates in a coherent manner.

20. The WTO should give effect to its development objectives in a practical and enabling way, not forgetting its special responsibility towards its most vulnerable Members, particularly least-developed countries. It also needs to play its part in the important task of advancing the economic empowerment of women through trade.

21. I know that I have what it takes as Director General to help the WTO make progress on these crucial issues. During my time here in Geneva as an Ambassador, and later as a Minister, I have been appointed by you, the Membership, to Chair all the top WTO bodies, including the Ministerial Conference. So, I am acutely aware that this is a Member-driven organization.

22. The role of the Director General was described by Peter Sutherland as that of a facilitator. This

means using every possible opportunity for building bridges among Members. It calls for someone who will work tirelessly to bring you, the Members, together to deliberate and converge on the issues facing this organization.

23. I have shown I can do this – the TRIPS amendment, the Expanded Information Technology Agreement and the Nairobi Decision on Export Competition in agriculture are just three examples.

24. As Director-General, I would use these proven skills to support you and work with you for the reform and renewal of the WTO. In me you would have a strong advocate for the value of the multilateral trading system and the need to make it more effective.

25. The role of Director-General carries few powers, but it can and should have a considerable positive

influence in moving forward the work of the WTO. If you choose me to be the next Director-General, I commit myself wholeheartedly to work collaboratively and inclusively – as I have always done – to make this organization work better for all its Members.

26. Thank you.

(Muchas gracias) - optional