

APPOINTMENT OF THE NEXT WTO DIRECTOR-GENERAL  
PRESENTATION TO THE WTO GENERAL COUNCIL BY  
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CANDIDATE OF THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA

## **I. Introduction**

Thank you Mr Chairman, and all distinguished delegates for the invitation. It is an honour to participate as a candidate in this selection process, and to share with you my vision for the WTO.

Call it a coincidence, but I was born in 1967, the year Korea acceded to the GATT, and I started my career in trade when the WTO was born in 1995. Over my lifetime, I personally witnessed Korea achieve remarkable growth, from a relatively impoverished country recovering from the ruins of war to one of the largest trading nations.

But I do not say this as a boast. Quite the contrary. My career in trade has convinced me it was the open trading system as represented by the WTO that gave Korea the opportunity to follow this development path.

Korea as a country, and I as an individual owe a debt of gratitude to the GATT and the WTO for providing the tools and economic environment necessary for our development. It is my firm commitment that all Members should have such opportunities regardless of their levels of development.

My 25 year career in international trade has taught me that solid groundwork is the basis of an agreement, and political will is what closes the deal. I have dealt with both the technical details of agreements, as well as engaged in finalizing major trade agreements as Trade Minister. I believe my extensive experience and expertise will enable me to offer insights and creative solutions to restore and revitalize the WTO.

When I came to Geneva in the early days of the WTO, there was optimism and excitement around the building. Despite many challenges, I am confident that the WTO will regain the hope and optimism. It would be a privilege and great task of my life to have the opportunity to serve as Director-General, and to work with Members to ensure the continued viability, and vitality, of the multilateral trading system.

## **II. Challenges Facing the WTO**

In voicing my confidence and optimism, I do not mean to downplay the challenges the WTO faces. Indeed, the WTO is at a crossroads, with the broader trade environment undergoing fundamental shifts and many questioning the relevance of the multilateral trading system.

We are now witnessing the threat of growing protectionism, and heightened trade tensions. Technological advances are transforming the way we produce, deliver, and consume goods and services in ways never imagined when the WTO was created. The global crisis induced by the pandemic is challenging the WTO's purpose of ensuring the smooth flow of goods and services.

The WTO, which was intended to provide predictability and stability in these times of turbulence, is now facing a trust deficit with all three pillars under stress.

Despite much good will and hard work, the record of negotiations in the WTO leaves much room to be desired. There has been progress, such as the adoption of the Bali and the Nairobi packages including the Trade Facilitation Agreement, but we need to do much more to meet the challenges and realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The stagnant negotiations have had negative consequences for all of the WTO's functions, and, to some extent, contributed to the current problems facing the dispute settlement system.

### **III. My Vision for the WTO**

Nonetheless, I am optimistic that the WTO can rise to meet these challenges. The pandemic has brought renewed commitment by Members to build a more robust international order. I believe the new Director-General should be pro-active, bringing energy and creativity to this effort.

My goal is to make the WTO more **relevant, resilient, and responsive**.

The WTO needs to keep evolving to become more **relevant** to changing economic circumstance and realities. The WTO needs to enhance sustainability and inclusiveness to remain **resilient** as a champion of open trade for the next 25 years and beyond. And the WTO needs to be more **responsive** to global challenges and contingencies for the benefit of all of its Members.

### **IV. Tasks Ahead**

These general ambitions will have to be translated into concrete actions to have real impact. Let me address just a few that I see as top priorities: MC12, WTO reform, and sustainable development.

#### ***First, the 12<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference.***

MC12 will be a critical milestone of Members' ability to deliver results and set the agenda for the future. The new Director-General must help make it a success in order to build trust in the WTO.

A successful outcome on fisheries subsidies will demonstrate the credibility of the WTO and its ability to contribute to global objectives on sustainable development. It will also provide the world with the benefits for

trade and environmental sustainability. I will do everything I can to support these negotiations and bring them swiftly to a successful conclusion, for endorsement by Ministers at MC12.

Electronic commerce is also an area in which we should work towards tangible outcomes. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of this issue. A comprehensive agreement by next summer may be ambitious, but I think we can take some concrete steps and lay out the path forward for post-MC12 work.

We also need to see real progress on development issues. This should always be an important part of every Ministerial Conference, but I think it is even more important in MC12 due to the impact of the pandemic on world trade, growth, and global value chains. The Organization should seek to take real steps that can help Members, especially the most vulnerable, deal with this on-going health and economic emergency.

### ***Second priority task, WTO Reform.***

I am well aware of the proposals that Members have put forward on WTO reform. I also know how sensitive these issues can be to individual Members. A high degree of trust among Members must be the starting point in exploring cooperative solutions.

All three pillars of the WTO need to work hand in hand to maintain a healthy and well-functioning multilateral trading system.

First, we need to update the rule-books and deliver agreements with real economic impact. Progress at MC12 will show that the WTO can address the real world problems societies and businesses face. I believe any agenda items that reflect the founding principles of trade liberalization and development in a balanced manner can be put on the table for discussion.

Another urgent, pressing issue is restoring the dispute settlement system. We need a stable and fully-functioning dispute settlement system which would effectively contribute to the prompt and satisfactory resolution of the disputes. I will act as an honest broker to facilitate constructive discussions to find an effective and permanent solution.

Implementation of agreements and increased transparency are also important elements of reform. The TBT and the SPS committees show how much we can achieve by meeting high standards of transparency to avoid unnecessary trade disputes from arising. Of course, specific means to achieve such objectives should take into consideration the capacity and needs of Members, commensurate with their level of development.

### ***Third, inclusive Trade and Sustainable Development.***

WTO reform should not be a goal in and of itself, but an instrument to promote economic prosperity and better living standards for all of its Members. To this end, the WTO should pursue inclusive trade

initiatives encompassing overall development issues, as well as specific, cross-cutting issues such as MSMEs, women's economic empowerment, and environment.

Among others, we should deepen our efforts to help developing countries, especially LDCs, secure a larger share in the growth in international trade. We should fully implement what has been agreed for LDCs and strengthen our technical assistance and capacity building programs. Further, while maintaining a central role for the WTO in seeking these important values, I will support cooperation with other international organizations in a proactive and forthcoming manner. This will help broaden the available resources and multilateral commitment to achieving Members' goals.

#### **V. How I See the Role of the Director-General**

The Director-General should bring optimism and also vision based on realism to the job. More importantly, the Director-General must enjoy the confidence of Members to rebuild trust in the Organization. To do so, the Director-General has to be an effective, trusted, and informed facilitator and a person who knows how and when to act to help achieve consensus and agreement.

Of course, all this will require a close and harmonious working relationship with you, Ambassadors, as well as your Trade Ministers back home. The WTO is, and will remain, a Member-driven Organization. We can only achieve our goals if we work together. My door will always be open. My phone will always be answered. I will be available whenever I am needed.

The WTO has an excellent Secretariat, and I will lead in a supportive and positive manner to keep attracting talented and ambitious professionals from around the world. I will actively support cross-cutting projects and transparency to support new initiatives, but at the same time to help breathe life into longstanding work programs. I will come to work every day enthused and energized and I will seek a Secretariat that does so as well.

I would like to close by recalling where I began this talk. I owe a great deal to the multilateral trading system represented by the WTO. To be given the opportunity to serve as Director-General of the WTO would be a tremendous honor and privilege. Should I be chosen to become the next Director-General I will give the job everything I have, all my time, my energy, and my hopes to make the WTO more relevant, resilient, and responsive. Thank you very much.