

Government of Tonga Statement – MC10 Nairobi – 17 December 2015
Delivered by the Hon Dr Pohiva Tu'i'onetoa
Minister for Commerce and Labour

On behalf of the Government of Tonga, may I extend our sincere appreciation to the Government of Kenya and its people for organizing this important Ministerial conference.

May I also place on record Tonga's appreciation to our Advisors in Geneva, the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat Office, and the coordinators of the African, Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP), and Small and Vulnerable Economies (SVEs) Groups.

Tonga is a small economy. We have small populations, dispersed across many islands and a large expanse of the Pacific Ocean. Climate change continues to threaten the lives and livelihoods of our people – we are currently the third most vulnerable country in the world to natural disasters.

As a “non-resident” delegation, Tonga wishes to reaffirm its commitment to the Multilateral Trading system (MTS).

Tonga believes that the WTO rules based system is important in ensuring certainty, predictability and transparency for small island countries like ours.

We note with concern the lack of progress in the Doha Development Round negotiations at the WTO. However, we still feel that we are better off inside the global trading system than outside it.

We also note with caution the rise of new mega-FTAs. While on the one hand they may be able to help advance some of the WTO issues, the potential for them to undermine the Multilateral Trade System is a major risk, which is a concern for Small and Vulnerable Economies like ours.

Tonga is fully committed to the achievement of the 2030 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We believe that any outcomes here in Nairobi be development-focussed, and coherent with the SDGs.

Given the development challenges and vulnerabilities facing LDCs and VEs, Special and Differential Treatment must be accorded to us.

Tonga wishes to renew the call for a more systemic approach to the treatment of the unique constraints faced by SVEs to support our beneficial integration into the global economy.

Tonga continues to face high trade costs such as trade-related infrastructure, energy, and ICT connectivity. We wish to acknowledge our major development partners who have contributed to Tonga's trade development. However, addressing our supply-side constraints remains the most significant challenge to increasing Tonga's capacity to trade. Tonga therefore stresses the importance of the WTO Aide for Trade initiative and calls for additional resources from our partners to assist Tonga in addressing these challenges.

Tonga applauds the approach of the TFA which links implementation to the gaining of appropriate capacities.

We believe that where appropriate, future multilateral trade agreements should also adopt this approach.

I am pleased to announce that we are currently undertaking necessary measures at the national level to ensure our Category Commitments are notified as soon as possible with a view to ratification in the near future.

Given the importance of the fisheries sector for Tonga, our Government continues to promote sector growth in a sustainable way. Fisheries is critical for livelihoods and local food security for the majority of our people, many of whom are small scale artisanal fishermen and women.

We support potential outcomes on the elimination of capacity enhancing fisheries subsidies that have negative impacts on marine ecology, ecosystems, because these ultimately undermine our quest for sustainable development.

Our challenge here is to balance sustainability and trade concerns with appropriate flexibilities for small and vulnerable economies that lack the capacity and resources to provide harmful levels of support.

Turning now to Tonga's regional setting, we attach particular importance to achieving closer economic integration with our neighbours, as a complement to the WTO's global approach. We have ratified the Pacific Island Countries Trade Agreement in goods and we are now preparing for its implementation. We are also planning to complete, by June 2016, our negotiations between our fellow Pacific Island Countries and Australia and New Zealand under a development-oriented PACER + Agreement.

Tonga feels that one cannot and should not separate the trade challenges at the multilateral level from those at the bilateral, regional and domestic level, but rather tackle them as an integrated package.

The linkage between the multilateral and regional level negotiations is critical. Timing is also of the essence. These need to be concluded sooner rather than later, with commitments that will secure important benefits to all parties.

We are appreciative of the opportunity to be here at the first WTO Ministerial to be held in Africa and the first Ministerial to be held in an ACP country.

We acknowledge the fact that it is highly likely that we will not have a comprehensive package that will be agreed on here.

This is disappointing but it is the reality we face.

Faced with this uncertainty in the negotiations, Tonga believes that it is imperative that we clearly establish our collective direction and mandates on the post Nairobi agenda and unresolved DDA issues.

Our key interests would include but are not limited to: preserving the Agriculture and NAMA flexibilities; fisheries subsidies; and a work plan and approach to address, in a meaningful and systemic manner, the needs of small, vulnerable economies.

Tonga also wishes to support the positions of the ACP, SVE and Pacific Groups.