

MC11

Plenary Session Statement

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State Secretary

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Not to be published until the speech begins!

Madame Chair,
Director-General,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me start by thanking Argentina for its wonderful hospitality – and for having organised this important conference.

The WTO Ministerial Conference takes place in Latin America for the first time. In my view, this is not a coincidence. This continent has come a very long way, and it continues to move. And the same is true for the WTO.

Our multilateral trading system stands for open markets and non-discriminatory trade. This is beneficial to all of our countries:

Free and rules-based trade ensures economic growth and jobs in industrialized, emerging and developing countries alike.

And thereby, free and rules-based trade contributes to peaceful relationships between our countries:

It is no coincidence that the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) was agreed in 1947. The economic crisis of the 1930s and the following devastating Second World War had

made the need for international cooperation and a global governance system for the world market very clear.

When the WTO was founded in 1995, this was based on a common spirit of ensuring peace and economic welfare to the benefit of all of its members.

Since the financial crisis in 2008, protectionism has been on the rise. But it is the wrong path. We believe that the path today must be again:

International cooperation and a strong global governance system. Indeed, without the WTO, the temptation to resort to protectionist methods would have been much stronger.

In particular we believe in the rule of law.

Strong global governance requires rules which can be enforced and sanctioned.

The WTO disposes of a credible and efficient dispute settlement mechanism which is unique for International Organizations. All WTO Members, including least developed countries, developing countries and countries with economies in transition have equal access to the dispute settlement mechanism.

This is a real asset which we should cherish and strengthen.

Ladies and Gentlemen, let me recall the G20 Leaders' commitment during the Hamburg Summit this July:

“We underline the crucial role of the rules-based international trading system. (...)

*We commit to work together with all WTO members to **make the eleventh WTO Ministerial Conference a success.**”*

The success of MC 11 will require a serious effort by all of us.

We have laid the necessary groundwork in intense technical negotiations during the past weeks.

Now we need the political will to find consensus.

The procedural rule that agreement should only be reached by consensus gives comfort to all of us. It ensures that all member countries have an equal say in the decision-making process, regardless of their economic power. But it also entails a responsibility for each and every member of the WTO:

All of us will need to show a spirit of compromise and flexibility in order to reach consensus.

The Preamble of the Marrakesh Agreement –by which the WTO was founded – calls for

*“**positive efforts** designed to ensure that developing countries, and especially the least developed among them secure a share in the growth of international trade”*

It also calls for

“mutually advantageous arrangements”.

We stand ready to fill these principles with life and call on all WTO members to do the same.

At the end of the day, I hope to see

First, progress in the Doha issues;

Second, progress in addressing new relevant issues for trade in the WTO like e-commerce and transparency.

Regarding e-commerce, in particular, we must face today's reality: Digital trade and technology

have triggered a profound transformation of economic and trade structures. When it comes to international governance instruments to address this global development, the WTO can and should make a contribution.

Let me also recall that this year, under German Presidency, G20 Members agreed to

“engage constructively in WTO discussions relating to E-commerce with the WTO’s Eleventh Ministerial Conference (MC 11) in mind.”

Ladies and Gentlemen,

this Conference offers many opportunities.

So let me conclude by citing Pope Francis, who used to be the Archbishop of this beautiful city:

“If we start without confidence, we have already lost half the battle.”

Let us be confident!

Ladies and Gentlemen, Thank you for your kind attention.