

Eleventh WTO Ministerial Conference

Plenary Session, 11 December 2017

Hong Kong, China

Madam Chair (Chairperson of the MC11, Ms Susana Malcorra),
Vice-Chairs (Vice-Chairs of the MC11, Dr Okechukwu
Enelamah and Mr David Parker), Director-General
(Director-General of the WTO, Mr Roberto Azevêdo), GC Chair
(General Council Chairman of the WTO, Mr Xavier Carim),
Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning.

2. First of all, I would like to thank the Government of
Argentina for hosting the Eleventh WTO Ministerial Conference
in Buenos Aires, and for all the warm hospitality that has been
extended to the Hong Kong, China (HKC) delegation.

3. It is also my honour to be one of the three Vice Chairs of this important event. And I must thank you all for your trust.

4. Trust is indeed what we most need now. This has been a challenging time for us all. In spite of Madam Chair's earlier call for serious reflection, we have come to Buenos Aires with more anxieties than certainty as there seems to be no prospect of any agreed outcomes so far. The anxiety is apparent as we could not bring ourselves together to pronounce a common vision in support of the rule-based multilateral trading system, which the 164 member economies have worked so hard to build and preserve in the last two decades.

5. As a founding Member of the WTO, and a staunch supporter of our rule-based multilateral trading system that it embodies, HKC is troubled to see that the multilateral trading system being cast in doubt, and worse still, put under attack. We should all take a moment to think about why the WTO was established in the first place. Between trade war and a

predictable rule-based system for resolving trade disputes, the choice is obvious. And for the past 22 years, the WTO has remained the best option to keep trade war at bay.

6. When I say keeping trade war at bay, the obvious example is our ability to settle dispute among Members through a functioning WTO system in accordance with rules and jurisprudence established. Of course no international organisation can claim perfection and the WTO is no exception. But the WTO is as good as we make it. The WTO is a forum in which each Member possesses an equal voice, as well as a shared responsibility. A shared responsibility is more important now than ever towards upholding it instead of walking away from it. It would therefore be incumbent upon us to help the WTO to rise up to all these challenges.

7. One immediate action that cannot be deferred is the early commencement of the Appellate Body Member selection process. HKC urges this to be restored so as to preserve one of

the most important pillars of the WTO.

8. Despite the strong headwind, we should not give up negotiations that can bring about improved disciplines and better market access for the benefit of all. We must also ensure that the WTO remains relevant to the evolving global trading environment. We therefore strongly support the statement released by the Friends of the System published earlier this morning.

9. Intensive negotiations over the past few weeks and months have produced no ready deals and the window is quickly closing. It would be no small achievement if we could reach a consensus on our future work over a number of topics such as e-commerce, investment facilitation, and MSMEs (micro, small and medium enterprises) - including how to improve MSMEs' access to information through transparency measures and good regulatory practices.

10. Services, of course, remains to be HKC's priority, and we would like to see the negotiations on domestic regulations in services trade intensified and the mandate under the GATS (General Agreement on Trade in Services) fulfilled. We also acknowledge that Members' development needs must also be taken into account in different aspects of the WTO's work.

11. With these remarks, I support the Chair's call for all Members to play a constructive role in the final discussions and to make the Ministerial Conference as well as the WTO a success for everyone. Too much is at stake to let it slip through our hands.

12. Thank you.