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**STATEMENT BY H.E. MS KATHERINE TAI
UNITED STATES TRADE REPRESENTATIVE**

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Hello, everyone. I look forward to participating in the Twelfth Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization.

It has been a long road to get to this point, including two plus years of grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic, the spread of variants, and more recently the Russian government's decision to wage an unprovoked and unjustified war against Ukraine.

However, as we gather for MC12, we are presented with an opportunity to work together to bring new life and new conversations to this institution that match the new challenges we are all facing.

While the pandemic has created significant challenges to the work at the WTO, it can also be the impetus that sharpens our focus on the institution.

It is our responsibility to prove to our citizens that global engagement and diplomacy can produce real results that improve their lives and address their day-to-day needs.

This means taking on the challenges of widening inequality, economic insecurity, and incentives that degrade working and living conditions for our people on this planet.

This is, after all, the vision of the Marrakesh Declaration and Agreement, on which the WTO was founded.

As I said when I was here in October, the United States is committed to the WTO. But we need to be clear-eyed about the challenges we face today, and rise to meet this moment.

We have seen in real time the effects of global supply and demand shocks. Economists forecasted a dramatic collapse in trade. But governments and stakeholders have rallied to keep trade flowing under challenging circumstances that we did not anticipate we would be facing.

The WTO rules contributed to maintaining the flow of global trade and fostered transparency on measures taken by countries to respond to the crisis.

The pandemic also forced us to adapt to new working formats. For those of us fortunate enough to be able to conduct our work at desks and through computers, the pandemic has supercharged the practice of telework and an increasing reliance on technology.

The digitization of all segments of our economy has already changed the global trade landscape, and continues to impact workforces in all our countries. In order to enable a full economic recovery and help our workers, we must work together to create rules that govern the emerging and evolving digital economy.

This means ensuring that our firms can compete around the world on a level digital playing field, but it also means making sure that these rules work for our workers and foster trust and confidence for our people across the board.

Now we are facing a new immediate challenge to the resiliency of trade, and to the lives and health of millions.

Russia's war against Ukraine has created a humanitarian disaster that extends well beyond Ukraine's borders. As a result, we are facing disruptions to the world's supply and distribution of staple commodities, which exacerbate the effects of inflation and create the risk of food insecurity for millions.

As the largest donor of humanitarian assistance for food security challenges, the United States is financing projects to help small farmers in need support their agricultural industries.

In the first four months of 2022, the United States donated more than \$1.5 billion to the World Food Program, comprising more than 40 percent of its donations.

I strongly urge the WTO Members with the capabilities to commit at MC12 to exempt their donations to the World Food Program from any export restrictions.

These cumulative crises have highlighted for many of us the need for resilience, stability and inclusion. Our shared norms and commitment to transparency can be a vital piece of the answer, as we saw during the early months of COVID.

The Biden-Harris Administration is committed to creating resilient and diversified supply chains – and the multilateral trading system can play a central role in this effort.

But as we have seen more recently, and more dramatically in the wake of the Russian invasion, our old habits and expectations will not be enough.

It's no secret that here in Geneva and around the world, people are challenging international institutions to work differently and better: to be more responsive, better at sharing information, and able to keep pace with the speed the 21st-century's demands. I've spoken before about the need to demonstrate that we can work together to make the WTO relevant to the needs of regular people.

This is why the United States embraced the call of so many of the WTO's emerging economy Members, for accommodations to the intellectual property rules for COVID vaccines that can facilitate the global health recovery needed to make possible a robust global economic recovery.

This Ministerial and its many challenging topics offers an opportunity to show creativity and innovation in how we work, how we engage each other, and how we are looking forward toward reform.

We must recapture a sense of common purpose and focus on what unites our work, rather than ideologies that divide us. We believe Members must engage in honest conversations about the role of the WTO in development, the risks of widening inequality, fundamental worker rights and employment, and the role of trade to be part of the solution in addressing climate change.

We have, as a group, an opportunity to send a clear message to the world that we will undertake a reform effort that is open and inclusive, that repositions the WTO to deliver on its foundational goals, and enables the organization to adapt to changing global realities.

That means the reform process must avoid being overly prescriptive at the outset. Good ideas come from everywhere. The process must be owned by the Members.

We stand ready to invest our energy, creativity, and goodwill in this effort and are eager for others to join us on this important journey.

I extend my best wishes to all my colleagues and I look forward to working closely with you on a good outcome for MC12 – and beyond.
