

Speech Commissioner Karel De Gucht, plenary meeting of the 9th WTO Ministerial Conference,

Bali - 4 December 2013

Chairman, colleagues,

I would like to commend Minister Gita and Indonesia for their hospitality and for organising this conference.

I feel a sense of purpose in the room. This is due to the big steps we have taken toward consensus since our last Ministerial Conference.

I am not speaking about consensus on a small thing!

I am referring to consensus on something meaningful that goes beyond the individual interest of any one Member. That is, consensus to put the WTO back at the centre of trade policy. Consensus to start delivering on the promises made in Doha 12 years ago. And, consensus to take a first step in Bali toward this objective and to make this Ministerial Conference a success.

Of course, success can mean different things to different people. But I think we can all agree that what we have in front of us as possible areas of agreement for this Ministerial Conference, would satisfy the definition for everyone.

Over the last few weeks we have made a tremendous effort to finalise negotiations and here I would like to pay tribute to the work of the new Director-General, M. Roberto Azevêdo. In this period we have gone through ups and downs, and crises and upheavals. After many months of discussions and long periods of uncertainty, we have reached agreement on the flexibilities available to developing countries in the implementation of the Trade Facilitation agreement, which addresses all concerns and ensures that developing countries and particularly the Least Developed Countries will be able to implement the agreement according to their own country-specific requirements. This is an outstanding result which shows that where there is a will, there is a way, and reinforces the development pillar of the possible outcome of this Ministerial Conference. For, if we combine the development benefits of the trade facilitation agreement as such with the support measures available under the agreement, we have a recipe for success. If we add to this the other development issues that are set to be agreed as well as the agriculture elements, we have a package that is well worth fighting for.

It is therefore with some trepidation that I see the uncertainty that surrounds the outcome. Conventional wisdom would dictate that if something is beneficial, there shouldn't be any obstacles toward agreeing it. But conventional wisdom doesn't necessarily take account of political motivations. I trust that over the next few days, conventional wisdom will win the day.

The immediate benefits of an agreement are, I think, obvious to everyone. The consequences of failure should be equally clear. There should be no mistake that it is the fate of the entire WTO that is at stake.

In my view, both metaphorically and physically, we have come too far to fail.