

**24<sup>th</sup> Geneva Week  
Meeting with Non-Resident Delegations  
Monday 9 July 2012**

**Amb. Elin Johansen  
Chair of the General Council**

**Opening remarks**

Good morning everyone,

I would like to welcome you to the 24<sup>th</sup> Geneva Week organized for WTO non-resident Members and Observers. I would also like to welcome the representatives of Regional Economic Organizations and members of other Specialized Bodies dealing with non-residents who are participating in this week's activities.

At the outset, let me underline the importance that I attach to this event, as it plays an essential role in fostering the principles of greater transparency and inclusiveness of all Members in the work and the decision-making process of the WTO. You are not physically present in Geneva on a regular basis. This does not, however, mean in any way that your views hold less weight. On the contrary, your views and inputs are an integral part of this Member-driven Organization, whose work and procedures are based on consensus.

This Geneva week is taking place at a particularly challenging time for the multilateral trading system, which is operating in a still fragile world economy. The financial and economic crisis has caused trade growth to decline in 2011. For 2012, projections are not much better and, worryingly, there are signals of increased protectionism. I believe we all would agree that there is a need for the WTO to remain vigilant in stemming the tendency to resort to protectionist measures. The WTO has a vital role to play in the fight against all forms of protectionism and in promoting economic growth and development. This was underscored by Ministers at MC8.

Today I would like to start with an overview of the work that is currently taking place as follow-up to MC8, before I turn to the other aspects of the General Council's work this year.

As you will recall, Ministers at MC8 set out a broad work programme for us in a large number of areas. Specifically, Ministers took seven stand-alone decisions on which work is taking place in the relevant WTO bodies.

Starting with the Decision on the Accession of LDCs: here work is currently under way in the LDC Sub-Committee, and is progressing well. In accordance with the Decision's mandate, the results of this work will come to the General Council at its July meeting later this month.

Work is also progressing on the E-commerce work programme - DDG Singh, acting on my behalf, held an informal consultation last week to follow up on the Ministerial Decision. In accordance with this Decision, progress in the work programme will be reviewed by the General Council at its July meeting. I would also note that detailed discussions on E-commerce are taking place in the Council for Trade in Goods, in the Services Council and in the Committee on Trade and Development.

Work is also on-going on the LDC Services Waiver, which will be reviewed by the General Council in December of this year.

Similarly, on the other four issues on which Minister took stand-alone Decisions at MC8 – the Work Programme on Small Economies, TRIPS non-violation and situation complaints, the LDC Transition Period under the TRIPS Agreement and the Trade Policy Review Mechanism – work is well under way in the relevant bodies.

In addition, you will recall that at MC8 Ministers, in the document under the title of Elements for Political Guidance, agreed on work in a number of areas under three themes: "Importance of the Multilateral Trading System and the WTO", "Trade and Development" and the "DDA". You can find the Elements for Political Guidance in Part I of the outcome document of MC8 (WT/MIN(11)/11).

Without going into details, the work set out under the first two themes includes: strengthening and improving the functioning of WTO regular bodies; strengthening the DSU; focused work in the CTD; small, vulnerable economies; Cotton; and Aid for Trade.

Let me mention that, on the focused work in the CTD, informal consultations are underway with a view to starting this work, which is aimed at operationalizing the mandate of the CTD as a focal point for development work in the WTO.

As General Council Chair, I have held informal consultations with a number of Members on the follow up of MC8, which also included an informal General Council meeting at the level of Heads of Delegation last month.

The main messages I have heard in these consultations relate to the fundamental value that Members attach to the Multilateral Trading System; to the need for strong messages with respect to the development aspect in WTO's work; and to the various areas of priorities of individual Members with respect to the work ahead.

As you will recall, MC8 also saw the approval of the accession packages of the Russian Federation, Samoa and Montenegro. I do not need to stress how important these achievements are for the countries concerned and for the membership as a whole. Montenegro and Samoa have already become Members on 29 April and 10 May, respectively. Russia will become a Member 30 days after the ratification of its Protocol of Accession by its national assembly, a process which is currently under way.

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Turning now to other aspects of the General Council's work this year, one of the decisions that the Council will have to take relates to the date and venue of the next Ministerial Conference. In April this year, I received a communication from the Minister of Trade of Indonesia offering to host MC9 in Indonesia in December 2013. I have undertaken consultations on this request, and most Members have welcomed the offer by Indonesia, including at the Heads of Delegation meeting on 7 June. Some Members have indicated that they needed some time to consult with their capitals. I trust the Council will be in a position to take a decision on this matter at its upcoming meeting at the end of the month.

Other issues which are on the General Council agenda this year relate to reviews of the Guidelines for the Appointment of Officers to WTO bodies and of Observer Status for IGOs in WTO bodies. On both matters I am undertaking consultations and I will report to the General Council as necessary. On the Appointment of Officers to WTO bodies, the General Council agreed at its February meeting to initiate a process of consultations with a view to reviewing the current guidelines. Two consultative meetings have already taken place where a number of Members have

highlighted a number of problems that were affecting the current process for appointment of Chairs to WTO bodies and proposed some possible solutions.

On Observer Status for IGOs in WTO bodies, I have held one consultative meeting and am consulting Members individually.

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In addition, and as part of its overall review and oversight function the General Council keeps the work of the Trade Negotiations Committee under regular review through a standing item on its agenda, with the DG, as TNC Chair, reporting to each regular Council meeting. You will hear more about the state-of-play in the DDA as well as on other current issues from the Director-General later today.

I just wish to note here that, beyond the immediate negotiating agenda, there are other work programmes under the DDA that are of special interest to developing-country Members. These include mandates provided by Ministers in the areas of Small Economies; Trade, Debt and Finance; Trade and Transfer of Technology; Technical Co-operation and Capacity Building; Least-Developed Countries; and Aid for Trade. Work on these non-negotiating elements is also being pursued under the overall supervision of the General Council.

As part of its general oversight function, the General Council regularly considers reports and recommendations for decision from its subsidiary bodies such as the Goods Council; the Services Council; the TRIPS Council; the Budget Committee and the Committee on Trade and Development – to name a few. There are also our on-going negotiations, both bilaterally and multilaterally, on the accession of the governments that are currently seeking WTO membership.

I do not intend to be exhaustive here, but just to give you an idea of the work ahead of us this year. You will be hearing more about many of the issues I have mentioned during the course of the week.

Before I conclude, let me wish you all a productive week here with us. I am sure you all intend to consult widely with the Chairs of the various WTO bodies, with other Members and with regional groupings on issues of interest to you. Please note that I am available to meet any Member and Observer delegation who so wishes.

All delegations – large and small, Geneva-based and non-Geneva-based – have their part to play in the work of this organization. As General Council Chair, I am committed to the principles of transparency and inclusiveness in our work. We have a collective interest, and a collective responsibility, in strengthening the multilateral trading system.