

CTS Workshop on E-commerce
17-18 June 2013
WTO, Geneva

Welcome remarks by WTO DDG Harsha V. Singh

Thank you Chairman.

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished speakers and guests,

I am pleased to welcome all of you to the workshop on Electronic Commerce. It has been some time in the planning and many WTO Member governments have contributed to bringing it to fruition in the form that we see today. I see that we have speakers with on a wide variety of topics with a great diversity of perspectives. We have here with us a representative cross-section of international organizations, private sector stakeholders and government agencies from both the industrialized and emerging economies, and from both large and small enterprises. It is not likely an exaggeration to say that the workshop is an example of public-private, and inter-agency collaboration on matters of mutual interest as concerns trade in what we now often refer to as the Digital Age.

Today's workshop is held under the auspices of the Council for Trade in Services. This event is part of a broader effort within the Services Council, and the WTO as a whole, to reinvigorate WTO's discussions on various aspects of electronic commerce.

This and other events demonstrate the WTO's commitment to address the implications of new technology and commercial opportunities for the trading system. This includes the workshop held by the Committee on Trade in Development on E-commerce, Development and SMEs. Also emblematic is the upcoming WTO Public Forum in October whose theme this year will be

“Expanding Trade through Innovation and the Digital Economy”. I must add that as usual, E-commerce will be an issue for consideration for the agenda of the WTO's Ninth Ministerial Conference to be held in Bali in December,

This workshop builds upon the one held earlier under the auspices of the CTD, on which Ambassador Williams will brief you. In some respects, I see that this Workshop was able to take the CTD event as a point of departure, to go into greater detail about ICT infrastructure developments, new business trends, and include quite a lot about regulatory practices that governments have employed to adapt to change. As with the CTD event, I am confident that the presentations and discussion today and tomorrow should provide useful inputs for the deliberations under way in the various WTO Bodies and in the preparations for the Ministerial Conference to be held this December. In the area of E-Commerce, the WTO's important contribution has been to maintain a moratorium on ‘customs duties on electronic transmissions’, which has been renewed at every WTO Ministerial since it was first adopted in 1998.

Through presentations as well as the interactive discussions that will take place here, it is my hope that we can collectively learn more about which policies have worked and what more needs to be done to facilitate access to e-commerce by businesses, including small and medium-sized enterprises. We hope to gain insight on what both developed and developing country governments can do to ensure that the ride is as smooth as possible, as obstacle-free as possible, for all of our international traders.

It is also worth pointing out that the issues we need to address at the WTO are fairly distinct and legalistic, including, for example, classification dilemmas, the implications of technological neutrality for the trade rules, when does a ‘challenge’ or ‘obstacle’ to e-commerce also fit within our definitions of a restriction on trade. Such questions should be kept in mind and, where

necessary, the issues raised and problems cited considered as part of our work on electronic commerce.

Achieving the full potential for e-commerce as a means of trading goods and services, and for achieving its development promise, is likely to require co-ordinated efforts across many different arenas. The trade system is only one of these arenas, but it is an important one. As I urged in my remarks at the CTD workshop in April, e-commerce can only realize its full impact through working together - through the joint efforts of many stakeholders including international organizations, civil society, academia, the public sector and the private sector, each with its particular experiences, expertise and functions.

I believe that this workshop, with the participation of such an impressive group of speakers and participants from around the world, offers yet another example of the WTO's willingness to improve the ways that economies, business and consumers can capture the benefits of e-commerce by better achieving the potential to enhance trade, spur growth, and promote economic development.

I thank you for your attention.