

TALKING POINTS – OPENING SESSION

DDG ANGELA ELLARD

29 June 2021 – 17:45-18:00 (CET) - Zoom

- Thank you, Tony for the introduction.
- It is an honor to close today's event.
- In her opening remarks, DDG Anabel Gonzalez promised you that the Symposium would generate many important insights. We have heard from more than 30 professionals engaged in different ways in the fight against this terrible virus. I salute them all for the valuable work they are doing to bring this crisis under control and to an end.
- I'm also encouraged by their willingness to engage and share their experiences. That willingness imparts an expectation – an expectation that the WTO is an organization that can deliver on the issues that matter. Let me assure you that I am every bit as committed to seeing the WTO deliver as an institution as Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, our Director-General. And there is no more pressing area in which the WTO must deliver than trade and health. In my closing remarks, I will focus on three points:
 - The role of trade in ending the COVID-19 health crisis;
 - The importance of partnerships and international cooperation now and in the future; and
 - Why predictability and transparency must transcend this and future crises.

Role of trade in ending the health crisis

- So, first, let me address the role of trade in ending the crisis. And here I note the following key takeaway from today's proceedings:

"To bring the pandemic under control, the contribution of trade **must grow**, not diminish."
- By the end of last week, nearly 23% of the world's population had received one dose of COVID-19 vaccine. Some 77% of the 2.92 billion COVID-19 vaccines administered were in five WTO Members: China, the European Union, the United States, India and Brazil.
- To reach more people in all countries, two things need to happen:
- First, more COVID-19 vaccine doses must be manufactured. This means more international trade in critical vaccine inputs. Without access to inputs, the additional doses will not be produced.

- And second, the movement of vaccines and their inputs through international trade channels must also grow. Trade is an indispensable component of achieving vaccine equity.
- Let me give you an analogy. Think of it like a runner starting a distance race. As she picks up the pace, her heart starts to beat faster. These are the factories pumping out vaccines at an increasing speed and volume.
- For the runner to keep the pace and finish the race, though, other parts of her body must play their part. The blood that the heart pumps must circulate throughout the entire body. The arteries and veins that bring critical inputs to factories and vaccines to populations across the world are the routes through which trade runs.
- Unfortunately, we heard examples today of where those trade arteries are impeded. We see deliberate obstructions, such as export prohibitions and controls, that seek to keep the blood supply in one part of the body. Inadvertent obstacles can arise from cumbersome regulatory processes or simply taking too long to release vaccine inputs. And we've listened to missed opportunities to widen the arteries and let more inputs and vaccines flow by streamlining requirements, increasing reliance on others, and agreeing common protocols.
- With the heart already slow to respond and these barriers clogging the way, we risk making the race to manufacture and distribute vaccines longer, slower, and more arduous than it should otherwise be. So let me be clear. These obstacles matter. They slow down not just flow of inputs and vaccines, but also the upscaling of production, complicating further our efforts to achieve equity in vaccine distribution. It was very clear today that trade is indispensable to achieving vaccine equity.

The value of partnerships and international cooperation

- As I mentioned at the outset, the Symposium has featured an impressive roster of experts and organizations engaged in the struggle to bring this crisis under control.
- Each has its own mandate and comparative advantage. The WTO does also. Acting on its own, each actor can achieve some things. But not everything. And when what Director-General Dr Ngozi calls a "problem of the commons" comes along, we may not achieve that much at all by acting independently.
- In our interconnected global economy, we need partnerships to tackle common problems. Whether it is overfishing, climate change, pandemics or many other "problems of the commons," our best chance is to pursue partnerships to address these issues.
- The WTO is partnering with a range of different actors. Some of these partnerships, like the trilateral cooperation with the World Intellectual Property Organization and the World Health Organization on trade and public health-related issues, are well-established. [Last week](#), Dr Ngozi, Dr Tedros, and Daren Tang mapped out where this collaboration can be further strengthened to provide expertise and evidence, and to coordinate assistance that is needed by governments to tackle the challenge of COVID-19.

- We are also actively engaged with the World Customs Organization. Our joint activities cover regular work on a broad scope of different topics, ranging from rules of origin to cooperation on customs classification and implementation of the Trade Facilitation Agreement. The information gathered at today's event on vaccine inputs is invaluable. It should enable us to better track these essential goods through global trade.
- In addition, the WTO is providing expert input on trade issues to the COVAX manufacturing taskforce. This is a two-way exchange. For example, information on where trade frictions are arising can be used to inform our work on trade monitoring. We can also feed in the many resources that we have developed at Members' request.
- These resources can be as simple as the details of a national trade facilitation contact point. Or this information can involve more complex explanations of how issues like conformity assessment are being approached by Members in relation to COVID-19 essential goods and more generally in the context of the Triennial Review of the TBT Agreement.
- More broadly, we can also assist Members on how to use the intellectual property system to notify needed COVID-19 health technologies that cannot be locally manufactured, thus aggregating demand and improving demand forecast.
- Collaborations with the IMF and World Bank continue as part of our coherence mandate. And new or existing dialogues are emerging, such as the World Local Production Forum that took place last week.
- This afternoon, we also heard about how national regulatory authorities are working together with the WHO towards a more coordinated approach, relying more on each other, and streamlining wherever possible, to expedite access to safe vaccines. We all understand that international regulatory cooperation is vital to combatting COVID-19.
- One common theme that runs through our interactions is the need for transparency and predictability – a theme that I will address in my next point.

Predictability and transparency

- What we have heard today from supply chain managers, regulators, and international organizations is the need for continuous adaptability and troubleshooting. Global merchandise trade continued to bounce back in the first quarter of 2021 from its collapse earlier in the pandemic. But the pace of recovery is diverging strongly across countries and regions, which means that trade is still digesting the shock. Some factories are struggling to keep pace with demand. Vaccine input suppliers are an obvious example. Other factories are idling or running at reduced capacity.
- This situation creates plenty of headaches for logistics managers, especially those of vaccine manufacturers. 2020 and 2021 have really tested the reaction speed of supply chain managers, as well as those of national regulatory authorities. Many of the supply chain problems should shake themselves out as global supply and demand comes back into better alignment.

- However, where there are deliberate obstructions and inadvertent obstacles, this process of realignment will take additional time. By working in concert, we can speed things up. We can work to ensure the safety, quality, and efficacy of approved vaccines. And we can seize the many opportunities to speed up the circulation of vaccines and other critical goods by widening the trade arteries through trade facilitating mechanisms.
- In her introductory remarks, DDG Gonzalez laid out several ways in which WTO can support efforts to ramp up production and pump them out to the world. Fundamentally, what she outlined comes back to predictability and transparency. Let me recall the five key areas:
 - Improving predictability of supply by identifying and reducing export restrictions.
 - Fostering cooperation and partnerships, including through voluntary licensing and technology transfer, as well as the effective implementation and use of policy options available in the WTO system;
 - Monitoring trade policies and ensuring transparency;
 - Contributing to building the capacity of regulatory authorities that are responsible for safety, quality, and efficacy of vaccines and other medical products; and
 - Promoting the collection of granular trade data in support of facilitating vaccine manufacturing and supply chains.
- These actions can be taken regardless of whether vaccines or other health products are in question. And they don't need any new disciplines – just enhanced engagement in existing structures and commitment to abide by rules of the game.

CLOSING

- In closing, let me recall that Dr Ngozi has called on us all to meet the challenge of vaccine equity. She unambiguously articulated the role that she sees trade as playing in this process.
- Today's Symposium has added further weight to her view. Indeed, as I said at the start of my remarks:

“To bring the pandemic under control, the contribution of trade **must grow**, not diminish”.
- Partnerships are essential in this process, both in the context of the current health crisis and future problems of the commons. And predictability and transparency must transcend this and future crises.

Thank you for your attention.