

Informal Ministerial Meeting on the WTO
Oslo, 21 – 22 October 2016

Chair's Summary of Discussion

Ministers and officials from 25 Members, representing a broad spectrum of the WTO membership with a common desire to safeguard the multilateral trading system and strengthening the WTO, met in Oslo on 21 – 22 October 2016 with the WTO Director General.

Ministers discussed what outcomes Members want to achieve by the next Ministerial Conference in 2017 and beyond, and how to develop convergence on such outcomes.

Ministers reaffirmed the importance of implementing the Nairobi and Bali outcomes and exploring ways to advance negotiations to build on those outcomes in the period ahead.

Ministers confirmed that they remained strongly committed to realizing the entry into force of the Trade Facilitation Agreement.

Ministers welcomed Argentina as host for the next WTO ministerial conference, MC11. They recognized the importance of preparing properly for MC11. Argentina indicated its thoughts on an inclusive process.

Based on experience from MC10 in Nairobi ministers underlined the need for continued political engagement, while instructing negotiators to do the job needed to secure negotiated results. The focus of the discussions in Oslo was on the political guidance the Ministers can provide in preparation for the 2017 WTO Ministerial Conference in Buenos Aires and beyond.

Ministers agreed that it is important that the WTO's negotiating function continue to deliver meaningful outcomes.

In the face of the backlash over trade all are facing, ministers recognized the importance of taking seriously the concerns expressed in the public debate over trade.

Ministers discussed the need to maintain the relevance of the multilateral trading system and to find ways to update the system in line with developments in the global economy.

Ministers had a first exchange of views on the merits of Regional Trading Arrangements as inspiration for furthering the multilateral trade agenda. The

strengthened role of the WTO in surveillance and collection of best practices should be further explored.

Ministers expressed the need for confidence building among themselves to ensure a positive outcome at Buenos Aires.

Ministers put development at the center of discussions. The debate underscored that integration of developing economies, and in particular, the least developed members, in the global trading system is an underlying theme of all trade issues.

Ministers highlighted the need to view issues in light of the interests and concerns of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises.

Ministers agreed that with MC11 just over a year ahead, it was now urgent to move from reflection to action. This transition must take place through a proposal-driven process aimed at securing outcomes by MC11 and beyond. The need for proponents to come forward with fresh ideas was underlined as well as the importance of constructive engagement and open minds.

Ministers noted that some concrete ideas are already on the table and some Ministers signaled their intentions of putting forward other concrete proposals for MC11, which was welcomed.

The need for an open, inclusive and transparent process leading up to MC11 was recognized by all.

Although there were differences in emphasis and priorities, many ministers stressed the need to be realistic, look for doable and meaningful results and be open to new approaches to get there.

In addition, ministers agreed that outcomes should be achieved through incremental steps rather than major leaps, at least in the short term.

The discussions were focused on some potential issues for further work in the lead up to MC11 while ministers noted that it is too early to assess what potential results may be achieved in Buenos Aires. Other issues need more time and scoping before Members seem able to reach consensus on the way forward.

Ministers were in general agreement that issues for further work in the lead up to MC11 with development at its center would likely include

- elements of domestic support in agriculture, based on updated notifications
- the mandated permanent solution for public stockholding for food security purposes,
- the other mandated tasks from Nairobi

- a multilateral process on fishery subsidies to deliver on the Sustainable Development Goal 14.6
- domestic regulations in services including trade facilitation.
- S&D and issues of particular relevance for the Least Developed Countries

The list is not exhaustive and issues like cotton, investment facilitation and NTBs should be kept in mind.

While noting the agreement at Nairobi that all Doha–issues remain on the table, ministers pointed to well-known topics that probably need more time before results may be harvested. They include

- continued reform in agriculture
- market access in NAMA, agriculture and services,
- rules issues beyond fishery subsidies,

Among so-called new issues, many ministers mentioned e-commerce as a potential candidate for harvesting results in one form or another in Buenos Aires, while others seemed more skeptical. Thus further focused, but open-minded, discussions and scoping on e-commerce are needed before any conclusions can be drawn.