



General Council

**AGENDA ITEM 3.A(I) – (II): FOLLOW-UP TO OUTCOMES OF
MINISTERIAL CONFERENCES – MC12**

STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL

Thursday, 14 December 2023

Item 3.A(i) WTO Reform – "Reform By Doing"

1.1. Since the beginning of the year, work has intensified in fulfilling Ministers' commitment at MC12 to work towards necessary reform of the WTO in all its functions. During this period, my predecessor and I have updated Members on WTO reform work at every regular meeting of the General Council.

1.2. Colleagues, in 2023, Members remained actively engaged in the reform work. A plethora of proposals was tabled, and many innovative ideas were shared that enabled WTO reform work to advance. I commend all of you for your hard work in this regard.

1.3. This year, we had informal meetings on WTO reform focused on development in February, deliberative function and institutional matters in June, and trade and industrial policy in September. We likewise had deliberations on trade and environmental sustainability at the Senior Officials' Meeting in October.

1.4. Following reform discussions on institutional matters, throughout the year, Members have emphasized the need to ensure meaningful Ministerial engagement during Ministerial Conferences. With MC13 fast approaching, there was demand from Members for the General Council Chairperson to establish a roadmap to guide the work in the lead up to MC13. In this regard, you may recall that I circulated in July a road map to MC13, which I further fleshed out following my consultations with Members in November.

1.5. Members continue to attach high priority to dispute settlement reform. You may recall that, in February 2023, Mr. Marco Molina of Guatemala started convening informal meetings on DS Reform with the objective of having substance-based discussions to find practical solutions to the concerns identified by Members. These discussions have intensified and, as I understand from the DSB Chairperson – Ambassador Ølberg, an agenda item dedicated to this matter will again be taken up at the DSB meeting on Monday, 18 December.

1.6. Reform-by-Doing work has also progressed this year. Notably, the Goods Council has adopted a report in [G/L/1523](#) capturing 127 reforms that have been implemented to improve the functioning of the Goods Council and its 14 subsidiary bodies.

1.7. These include significant changes to assist delegates, measures to improve the planning and organization of meetings, the procedures for the conduct of formal and informal meetings and the introduction of digital tools to improve productivity and exchange of information.

1.8. I also note that important efforts have been undertaken in other WTO Councils and Committees. Following Members' request, the General Council continues to monitor progress and coordinate with WTO Bodies as "reform-by-doing" work advances. In this regard, in addition to the reports by respective Chairpersons of WTO Bodies, I asked the Secretariat to continue updating the report in [JOB/GC/359](#) at every regular session of the General Council at least until MC13. An update of the report was circulated prior to the Senior Officials' meeting, and the most recent revision was circulated as [JOB/GC/359/Rev.2](#) on 11 December.

1.9. As we inch closer to MC13, WTO reform has become an important element of our preparations to ensure a successful Ministerial Conference in Abu Dhabi. In this regard, as you have heard from my report on Tuesday at the TNC, Members are currently working on a section on WTO reform for a possible MC13 outcome document.

1.10. This comprises (i) a reaffirmation of Ministers' WTO reform commitment at MC12, (ii) a general acknowledgement of the progress of WTO reform work since Ministers last met, (iii) welcoming and taking note of reform-by-doing efforts, a paragraph on DS reform – which would depend on the ongoing process, (iv) acknowledging the reform retreats, and (v) recognizing the need for all Members to deepen dialogue in a more focused manner to improve understanding on issues.

1.11. I recognize that, at MC13, the General Council and its subsidiary bodies are tasked to report on progress on WTO reform work. Given the numerous discussions and the amount of work we have accomplished thus far, I encourage all Members to continue participating in WTO reform work in this spirit. Let us together seize available opportunities, address the challenges faced by the WTO, and ensure the Organization's proper functioning – through WTO Reform.

Item 3.A(ii) Paragraph 24 of the Ministerial Declaration on the WTO Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic and Preparedness for Future Pandemics

1.12. Pursuant to paragraph 24 of the Ministerial Declaration on the WTO Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic and Preparedness for Future Pandemics ([WT/L/1142](#)): "A stocktaking exercise will be taken of the work by WTO bodies under this declaration yearly at the General Council until the end of 2024, based on the reports of those relevant bodies."

1.13. As Members may recall, this annual stocktaking exercise was undertaken at the July General Council meeting. I am pleased to report that work in this area has continued, as reported to me in my meeting with Chairpersons of regular WTO bodies earlier this week.

1.14. The Goods and Services Councils have adopted reports contained in [G/L/1521](#) and [S/C/66](#). The TRIPS Council has continued its discussions under an agenda item named "IP and COVID-19". Also under this item, Members continued their practice of sharing experiences on domestic COVID-related IP measures, which they have taken during the pandemic on the basis of a Secretariat compilation of such measures that is updated and maintained on the WTO website.
