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JOINT COMMUNIQUÉ OF THE OTTAWA GROUP ON WTO REFORM

COMMUNICATION FROM CANADA

The following communication, dated 25 January 2019, is being circulated at the request of the delegation of Canada.

We, Ministers and Heads of Delegation representing a group of like-minded World Trade Organization (WTO) Members, met in Davos, 24 January, chaired by the Honourable Jim Carr, Canada's Minister of International Trade Diversification, to continue our discussion of ways to strengthen and modernize the WTO to enable it to continue performing its critical role in promoting global trade.

As outlined when we last met in Ottawa, 24-25 October 2018, we share a common resolve for rapid and concerted action to address the unprecedented challenges facing the multilateral trading system and to restore confidence in it. We identified the need for action to safeguard and strengthen the WTO dispute settlement mechanism, to reinvigorate the negotiating function of the WTO, and to strengthen the monitoring and transparency function of the WTO. We also agreed that we must explore how the development dimension, including special and differential treatment, can be best pursued in rule-making efforts.

We are concerned that these challenges have only become more urgent since our last meeting. We note with concern the sharp rise in trade restrictive measures over the past year and encourage all Members to exercise restraint. Building on the recent statement by the leaders of the G20 on the need for WTO reform, we count on constructive engagement by their representatives to improve the functioning of the WTO and look forward to significant progress ahead of the G20 Ministerial and Leaders' meetings in June under the Japanese Presidency.

All Members have a duty to safeguard the WTO dispute settlement system. In this context, we refer to the recent proposals from several of us to strengthen the dispute settlement mechanism and support the process initiated by the General Council Chair to hold solution-oriented discussions with a view to restoring a fully operational Appellate Body without delay. We will also intensify our engagement in the ongoing examination of the proposal to enhance transparency and strengthen notification requirements under WTO Agreements.

To improve the WTO's deliberative and monitoring functions and ability to solve trade concerns without litigation, our officials will begin open-ended consultations with all interested Members to develop collective proposals on a cross-cutting and committee-by-committee basis.¹

We urge all Members to constructively engage in negotiations over the coming months to achieve a comprehensive and effective agreement on fisheries subsidies in 2019. To further reinvigorate the negotiating function, we also urge all Members to work towards addressing pending and unfinished business, including market distortions caused by subsidies and other instruments.

We look forward to reviewing progress when we meet again in May 2019.

¹ The initial focus will be on the work in four WTO bodies - Rules of Origin, Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures, Council for Trade in Services, and Technical Barriers to Trade.