

Japanese FM: WTO reforms at MC13 in UAE essential to meet global challenges

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By Binsal Abdulkader

ABU DHABI, 23rd February, 2024 (WAM) -- The World Trade Organization's (WTO) 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) in Abu Dhabi next week is an opportunity for the organization to equip itself to meet the global challenges, Japanese Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa told the Emirates News Agency (WAM).

MC13 is taking place as the rules-based multilateral trading system, with WTO at its core, faces multiple geopolitical and economic challenges, she pointed out in an email interview with WAM from Tokyo.

"The conference is called the 'Reform Ministerial.' We must use this opportunity to transform the WTO to demonstrate that the organization can effectively respond to these global challenges by advancing the necessary reform of all key functions," Kamikawa emphasised.

UAE at forefront

The UAE will host MC13 from 26th to 29th February 2024 in Abu Dhabi, after successfully organising COP28, the UN Climate Conference in Dubai in December 2023.

Around 164 nations and trading blocs will participate in Ministerial Conference, the WTO's top decision-making body, which meets usually every two years.

The Japanese top diplomat appreciated the UAE Government and Dr. Thani bin Ahmed Al Zeyoudi, Minister of State for Foreign Trade and MC13 Chair, for

their efforts and leadership in hosting and chairing this conference.

“I would also like to express my deep respect for the UAE for having always been at the forefront in upholding the value of free trade.”

As major trading partners that share the value of free trade, Japan and the UAE are currently working together for the success of MC13 with a view to strengthening a rules-based multilateral trading system with the WTO at its core, Kamikawa affirmed.

WTO reforms

Elaborating on her views about the WTO reforms, the foreign minister suggested that the members must make progress in this regard to make the WTO well-equipped to tackle new global challenges such as climate change, supply chain disruptions, the widening gap among countries, and barriers in promoting digital trade.

She emphasised the inclusivity in global trade to ensure the participation of all people, regardless of their gender or background.

Kamikawa expressed her country’s “strong hopes” for a positive outcome on dispute settlement reform at MC13, paving the way for a fully and well-functioning dispute settlement system accessible to all members by 2024.

Reinforcement of the deliberative function of the WTO is also important, she said, hence the global body can

address the challenges that international trade faces today, such as effectively addressing trade-distortive industrial subsidies.

Other priorities

Japan is looking forward to the early enforcement of the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies, Kamikawa noted.

In this regard, accelerating the second wave of the negotiation is also important not only for the rule-making function of the WTO, but also for sustainable development achieved through fisheries resource management as well as the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), she explained.

Furthermore, the top diplomat stressed, the continuation of the moratorium on imposing customs duties on electronic transmissions is essential to further foster certainty and predictability for businesses and avoid significant disruptions to international trade and investment.

Support for developing countries

The foreign minister pointed out that Japan has been supporting developing countries' participation in the multilateral trading system, especially women's participation in digital trade, through contribution to the Aid for Trade (AfT) projects of the International Trade Centre (ITC).

As for sustainable development, she pointed out, Japan is the first member to contribute to the WTO Fisheries

Funding Mechanism, which facilitates implementation of the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies by developing countries including least developed countries (LDCs).

In this regard, Japan welcomes the adoption of the decision on the extension of support measures for LDC graduating countries by the General Council in October last year, as well as the expected accessions of Comoros and Timor-Leste, both of which can be successful outcomes of MC13, Kamikawa affirmed.

Moreover, she explained that advancement of plurilateral initiatives including the Joint Statement Initiatives (JSIs) on e-commerce, Investment Facilitation for Development, and Services Domestic Regulation currently being pursued at the WTO by likeminded members, will be a growth driver for a wide range of members and bring about benefits for many people.

“Japan strongly supports incorporating the outcomes of JSIs into the legal framework of the WTO.”

Japan-UAE ties

Japan and the UAE celebrated the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations in 2022, the top diplomat noted.

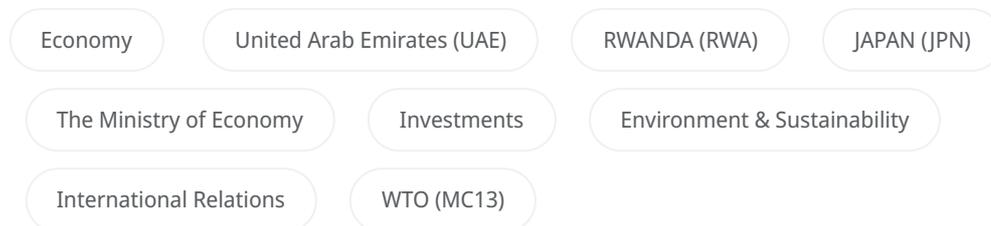
“Japan and the UAE will deepen their cooperation beyond the traditional areas such as energy and economy, to include a wide range of fields including climate change, education, science and technology, outer space and defence, under the ‘Comprehensive

Strategic Partnership Initiative (CSPI)'. Such cooperation could be further expanded in the field of international trade as well."

In addition, Japan values the UAE's efforts on establishing and strengthening legal frameworks to promote international trade. In this context, Japan looks forward to resuming negotiations for a Japan-GCC Free Trade Agreement (FTA) this year, Kamikawa noted.

"Japan also appreciates the fact that the UAE is providing a safe venue with appropriate protection for international companies to expand their business in the Middle East and Africa," the foreign minister concluded.

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