

Joint Press Release
by the Government of Japan and the World Trade Organization Secretariat

During her visit to Japan, Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Director-General of the WTO, met with Mr ISHIBA Shigeru, Prime Minister of Japan. She also held meetings in Tokyo with Mr. IWAYA Takeshi, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. KATO Katsunobu, Minister of Finance, and Mr. MUTO Yoji, Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry, discussing the importance of maintaining and strengthening the multilateral trading system.

The Government of Japan, recognizing that this year marks the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the WTO and the 70th anniversary of Japan's accession to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), reaffirmed its deep belief in, and commitment to, the rules-based, free and open multilateral trading system with the WTO at its core. Japan emphasized its status as an open economy, recalled the critical role the WTO has played in its own development. It warmly welcomed the visit of the WTO Director-General to Japan during this commemorative year.

The Director-General discussed with the Prime Minister and other key ministers the growing pressures facing the multilateral trading system, including rising trade tensions and risks of fragmentation. They shared the view that, in a time of uncertainty and disruption, the value of the multilateral trading system is unquestionable. They reiterated their shared commitment to working closely together, along with other WTO Members, to manage current and future tensions in global trade, to strengthen the multilateral trading system, and to advance meaningful reform of the WTO.

Two key themes featured prominently during the meetings.

(1) Free, Open and Predictable Trade as a Key Driver of Growth

- They concurred that economic integration anchored in free and fair and rules-based trade has fueled economic growth and prosperity of WTO Members and for the wider global economy.
- They highlighted the importance of ensuring a level playing field for trade by addressing tensions arising from unfair trade practices.
- They highlighted the need to promote the participation of developing countries (particularly least-developed country Members) in global supply chains, a process supported by WTO rules and Members' commitments.
- Highlighting that many countries and communities had not shared adequately in the gains from global trade, the Director-General emphasized the potential for 're-globalization' to promote growth and poverty reduction, and mitigate risks associated with overconcentration in the production of some goods, while enhancing the resilience of supply chains to shocks of various kinds.

(2) Reinforcing the Multilateral Trading System with the WTO at its Core

- They shared the view that the WTO remains a vital part of the global economic architecture, providing stability and predictability for cross-border economic activity. It hosts not just tariff obligations, but also a broad set of trade rules that cover, among others, trade in services, intellectual property rights, subsidies and non-tariff measures.
- Approximately 74% of global goods trade continues to flow on core WTO 'most-favored nation' (MFN) tariff terms. Predictable markets are beneficial for businesses and households, enhancing confidence to invest and consume.
- The multilateral trading system can be further strengthened through new multilateral and plurilateral rules and decisions at the WTO, potentially complemented by regulatory cooperation as well as comprehensive, high-standard and balanced bilateral or regional trade agreements that build on the multilateral framework.
- They underscored the need to make the WTO fit for the 21st century through a Member-driven process to tackle longstanding issues such as level playing field concerns, better integration of developing countries, and reforming the dispute settlement system.

The Government of Japan, recognizing that the current trade turmoil would have a significant impact on the global economy and the entire multilateral trading system, called for promoting WTO reform in a way that allows all Members to participate based on three pillars: a) strengthening the rule-making function to address the current circumstances, including through plurilateral agreements ; b) dispute settlement reform; and c) strengthening the functions of monitoring the implementation of agreements and deliberation. The Government of Japan stressed the importance of addressing structural problems such as the self-declared status of "developing countries". It also highlighted the need of ensuring that disputes are resolved in line with the rules in the interim until the dispute settlement reform is realized, in order to further enhance trust in the WTO, as the core of rules-based, free and open multilateral trading system. The Government of Japan also expressed its appreciation for the efforts and leadership of Director-General Dr. Okonjo-Iweala and reiterated its commitment to continue to provide her with all possible support.

The Director-General welcomed Japan's commitment and support to the multilateral trading system and reiterated her commitment to continue working with all WTO Members to ensure that their actions continue to be supportive of the rule-based multilateral trading system. She also pledged to help them advance the work on the re-positioning and reform of the WTO to ensure that the WTO can continue to serve as a bedrock for global economic growth and prosperity.

Finally, they reaffirmed the intention to deepen collaboration towards concrete outcomes at the 14th WTO Ministerial Conference to be held in Yaoundé, Cameroon, in March 2026, demonstrating the enduring relevance of the WTO in addressing today's challenges.