

MEDIA RELEASE

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Advancing Negotiations on Trade in Services

Over the past several months a number of WTO Members* have been exploring different negotiating approaches aimed at progressing the liberalization of trade in services.

We have found that the WTO General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) provides a strong foundation. At the same time, there have been considerable developments in advancing the liberalization of trade in services in the sixteen years since its conclusion.

A significant number of Members have made great advances in opening up their markets, both autonomously as well as through more than 100 services trade agreements notified to the WTO. Many of these agreements have broken new ground both in terms of market access and in the development of improved services trade rules.

We believe it is time to bring this progress back to Geneva with the ultimate aim of reinforcing and strengthening the rules-based multilateral trading system.

We plan to move our exploratory discussions to a new phase aimed at clearly defining the contours of an ambitious agreement on trade in services to allow us to undertake any necessary consultations or procedures prior to any negotiations. Any such agreement would build upon the achievements of the GATS and the developments mentioned above. Such an agreement would aim to capture a substantial part of the liberalization achieved in other negotiations on trade in services. The outcomes of the agreement could then be brought into the multilateral system.

Any such agreement should:

- Be comprehensive in scope, including substantial sectoral coverage with no *a priori* exclusion of any sector or mode of supply;
- Through negotiation, include market access commitments that correspond as closely as possible to actual practice and provide opportunities for improved market access; and
- Contain new and enhanced rules developed through negotiations.

We encourage other WTO Members who share a high level of ambition for the liberalization of trade in services, including these objectives, to take part in this effort. We are considering how to further broaden participation of developing countries and how to take into account the interests of least-developed countries.

We plan to intensify our work from September to develop these concepts further and begin working on the mechanics for achieving our shared objectives.

*Australia, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, European Union, Hong Kong China, Israel, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway, Pakistan, Peru, Republic of Korea, Switzerland, Separate Customs Territory of Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen and Matsu, Turkey, United States of America.

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