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General Council

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STATEMENT ON COVID-19 AND THE MULTILATERAL TRADING SYSTEM BY MINISTERS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE WTO FROM AFGHANISTAN; AUSTRALIA; BARBADOS; BENIN; CAMBODIA; CANADA; CHILE; COLOMBIA; COSTA RICA; ECUADOR; EL SALVADOR; GUATEMALA; GUYANA; HONG KONG, CHINA; ICELAND; ISRAEL; JAMAICA; JAPAN; KENYA; REPUBLIC OF KOREA; THE STATE OF KUWAIT; LIECHTENSTEIN; MADAGASCAR; MAURITANIA; MAURITIUS; MEXICO; REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA; MONTENEGRO; NEPAL; NEW ZEALAND; NIGERIA; NORTH MACEDONIA; NORWAY; PAPUA NEW GUINEA; PERU; QATAR; SAINT LUCIA; KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA; SEYCHELLES; SINGAPORE; SOLOMON ISLANDS; SWITZERLAND; UKRAINE; UNITED ARAB EMIRATES; UNITED KINGDOM; URUGUAY AND VIET NAM

*Revision**

The following joint ministerial statement, dated 30 July 2020, is being circulated at the request of the delegation of Switzerland.

1.1. The spread of COVID-19 has led to a devastating human tragedy and responding to this global health crisis remains a priority of our respective governments. Our focus continues to be on efforts to protect human life. Now more than ever is the time for the international community to step up cooperation and coordination.

1.2. As Ministers responsible for the WTO, we are actively working to ensure the continued flow of vital medical supplies and other essential goods and services across borders during this health crisis. The WTO has an essential role to play in this regard. We stress that trade restrictive emergency measures aimed at protecting health, if deemed necessary, shall be targeted, proportionate, transparent and temporary, not create unnecessary barriers to trade or disruption to global supply chains, and be consistent with WTO rules. We pledge to lift any such measures as soon as possible.

1.3. We underscore the importance of maintaining well-functioning supply chains in order to deploy international resources more effectively and call for intensified cooperation between the WTO and other international organizations in support of a coherent response to this and future health crises.

1.4. We encourage work at the WTO on concrete actions aimed at facilitating cross-border flows of vital medical supplies and other essential goods and services, including through the application of best practices and simplified procedures and through further trade opening.

1.5. We also stress the necessity of maintaining agriculture supply chains and preserving Members' food security. We, therefore, pledge to not impose export restrictions and to refrain from implementing unjustified trade barriers on agricultural and food products in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.6. We support the vital role of the WTO as it monitors trade-related measures implemented by WTO Members in response to the COVID-19 situation, and we encourage Members to continue notifying the WTO of any such measures as far in advance as practicable.

* This revision is to add Viet Nam as co-sponsor to this joint ministerial statement.

1.7. We are also facing a global economic shock that will continue to require a coordinated international response. We recognize the enormous challenges that will be faced by developing Members and, in particular, least developed Members. We also note that the negative impact will be especially severe for micro, small and medium sized enterprises, and we will intensify our efforts to support their ability to make a contribution to economic recovery.

1.8. We support the full resumption of all WTO activities as soon as feasible. We will intensify our efforts to develop new WTO disciplines, to improve existing WTO disciplines and to find a lasting solution to the situation relating to the WTO Appellate Body in order to support long-term, sustainable economic growth. We will also support continued efforts to reform the WTO so that it is as effective as possible.

1.9. A predictable, transparent, non-discriminatory and open global trading system will be essential for broad-based, sustainable economic recovery. We, therefore, strongly reaffirm our support for the rules-based multilateral trading system and the central role of the WTO. We will continue to act in a manner consistent with our WTO rights and obligations. We will refrain from raising new unjustified barriers to investment or to trade in goods and services.
