

MC12 Closing Session



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Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

MC12 is coming to a close - a bit later than expected but with an unprecedented package of deliverables. Not in a long while has the WTO seen such a significant number of multilateral outcomes.

We came here to deliver results. Back on Sunday – which feels like a long time ago – we recognized that even one or two deliverables would be better than none. And now we nearly got them all.

Excellencies, you will not be going home empty-handed.

You stepped up and delivered in every area we have been working on. For much of this week, you have worked day and night. You have waited patiently for long hours as others tried to get through a negotiation.

Monday was my birthday and I received a lot of flowers. I thank you again for them. But a successful MC12 is an even better present.

The package of agreements you have reached will make a difference to the lives of people around the world. The outcomes demonstrate that the WTO is, in fact, capable of responding to the emergencies of our time. They show the world that WTO members can come together, across geopolitical fault lines, to address problems of the global commons, and to reinforce and reinvigorate this institution. They give us cause to hope that strategic cooperation will be able to exist alongside growing strategic competition.

In response to the ongoing shocks from COVID-19, the declaration you just adopted will make access to medical supplies and components more predictable in this pandemic – and in the next one. The TRIPS waiver compromise will contribute to ongoing efforts to deconcentrate and diversify vaccine manufacturing capacity, so that a crisis in one region does not leave others cut off.

In response to the worst food security crisis in decades, you have taken steps to make trade in food and agricultural inputs more predictable, and hence prices less volatile. And you are going to make it easier for the World Food Programme to do its difficult job of feeding millions of the world's most vulnerable people.

On fisheries subsidies, WTO members have for the first time concluded an agreement with environmental sustainability at its heart. This is also about the livelihoods of the 260 million people who depend directly or indirectly on marine fisheries.

The agreement prohibits support for Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing. It bans support for fishing in overfished stocks. And it takes a first but significant step forward to curb subsidies for overcapacity and overfishing by ending subsidies for fishing on the unregulated high seas. As important as the prohibitions is the transparency that will finally shed light on the actual level of subsidies going to fishing. And you have committed to further negotiations to build on these disciplines.

You found a way to extend the e-commerce moratorium along with the work programme, thus preserving the enabling environment the WTO provides to the global digital economy and the millions of businesses and jobs that depend on it.

And amid the widespread recognition that the WTO's core functions need to be updated and improved, you have initiated a Member-driven process of institutional reform. You recognized the role trade and the WTO can play in empowering women, achieving environmental goals, and expanding opportunities for micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises.

During the long days and longer nights this week, there were many moments when I feared we would come out of MC12 with nothing at all. And I found myself thinking of a line attributed to Winston Churchill. "Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts." I want to thank God for that courage because there were moments when I did not know whether it would work.

And Excellencies, we succeeded, and we have determined to continue.

Members have agreed to pick up right where we left off this morning, raising the possibility of an earlier MC13. I promise to go back to work immediately. Get ready, tomorrow is another day post-MC12.

While we all agree on the vital importance of agriculture in our economies, differences on some issues, including public stockholding for food security purposes, domestic support, cotton and market access, meant that we could not achieve consensus on a new roadmap for future work. But here too, Members found a renewed sense of purpose: they are determined to keep at it on the basis of existing mandates with a view to reaching positive outcomes at MC13.

Excellencies, over the past few weeks, I have seen something else that is critical to putting the WTO back on track. Many of you have heard me complain that the WTO, though set up as a negotiating forum, had instead turned into a diktat forum, a place where members show up and tell each other "this is what I want, just give it to me."

But recently, and especially among ministers this week, we have seen genuine give-and-take. A willingness to listen to others' concerns, to depart from long-held positions, to try to overcome the trust deficit and find middle ground. Instead of asking themselves "is this everything we wanted?" members asked "can we live with this?" If we can somehow bottle this spirit, it will stand us in good stead to deliver more results in the future. That said, I am still baffled by how you can spend so many hours arguing over a word in a footnote.

These negotiations are always hard. As one minister said at some point – was it today? yesterday? the day before? – trade diplomacy is about balancing policy with politics: about finding compromise deals that still deliver tangible economic benefits, but that you can also take home and defend to your domestic constituencies. That's a tall order – and it's why we should all appreciate how important it was that you were able to come together this week.

Excellencies, I came to the WTO because I am firmly convinced that trade is part of the solution to the crises of our time. This important institution can and must do more to help the world respond to the pandemic, tackle environmental challenges, and foster greater socioeconomic inclusion. So I am proud, honoured – and relieved – to have been able to support your achievements at MC12. And I believe the results you have delivered here are a foundation for more in the months and years ahead.

Before closing, I want to express my deep gratitude, first to my husband, who is seated right here. I want to thank the MC12 Chair, His Excellency Timur Suleimenov, First Deputy Chief of Staff of the President of Kazakhstan, who has guided our processes here with good humour, charm, and patience.

He has been ably assisted by Vice-Chairs His Excellency Jerome Walcott, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Barbados; His Excellency Don Farrell, Minister for Trade and Tourism of Australia; and Her Excellency Harriet Ntabazi, Minister of State for Trade of Uganda, as well as our tireless Minister-Facilitators, Her Excellency Betty Maina, Cabinet Secretary for Industrialization, Trade and Enterprise Development of Kenya; His Excellency Damien O'Connor, Minister of Trade and Export Growth of New Zealand; Her Excellency Kamina Johnson Smith, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Jamaica; and Her Excellency Keisal Peters, Minister of State with Responsibility for Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

I also want to thank Her Excellency Ambassador Zhanar Aitzhanova of Kazakhstan, who has been working on this ministerial for almost three years now, and probably never wants to hear "MC12" ever again.

And let me once again pay tribute to the Government of Kazakhstan for years of cooperation, and especially for the graciousness with which they weathered the many setbacks on the road to this week, including the shift in venue from Nur-Sultan to Geneva. I also thank the Swiss authorities for their support, generosity, and flexibility.

I would like to thank once more the ministers and delegates present here, and the heads of state and government and the capital-based officials who played a big part in making these results possible. Geneva ambassadors – I know I can say tough things to you, but I want you to know how grateful I am for your weekends and nights of hard work.

My renewed thanks go to the Chairs of the negotiating groups, especially Ambassador Santiago Wills of Colombia, our fisheries chair, and to GC Chair Ambassador Didier Chambovey of Switzerland, his predecessor and pandemic response Facilitator, Ambassador Dacio Castillo of Honduras, and TRIPS Council Chair Ambassador Lansana Gberie of Sierra Leone. Your incredibly persistent efforts made today's outcomes possible. I also want to thank the chair of the agriculture negotiations, Ambassador Gloria Abraham Peralta of Costa Rica – we would not have been this well positioned for post-MC12 work without you.

And finally, I want to thank the wonderful WTO Secretariat, the Deputy Directors-General, and my own team. I know how much you have put in to making this conference a success. And I hope you will all get some sleep this weekend.

Chair, we have one more matter to take care of. One of the fun things about being DG is the opportunity to bang a gavel – I noticed you have been getting pretty good at it yourself. And so, in line with WTO tradition, I have the pleasure to present you this ceremonial gavel of your own, as a token of our thanks. Thanks to Members' efforts this week under your chairmanship, you have good reasons to use it!