



**Committee on Agriculture
Special Session**

NEGOTIATING GROUP ON AGRICULTURE

**REPORT¹ BY THE CHAIRMAN, H.E. MR. JOHN ADANK,
TO THE GENERAL COUNCIL²**

14 March 2014

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1. Since the Trade Negotiations Committee met on 6 February, I have held a series of consultations with individual delegations, group delegations and group representatives. These consultations have been aimed at developing a better understanding of how Members see the way forward for the unfinished business in the mandated negotiations on agriculture.

1.2. This is the beginning of a process that I would expect to intensify in coming weeks as delegations deepen their engagement aimed at identifying paths to greater convergence on these issues that have not been the subject of active discussion, in many cases, for a number of years. Accordingly I remain available to hear further views from individual delegations or groups and am also planning to convene an open-ended informal meeting of the Special Session before the end of the month to seek further views and information from Members. This report is, accordingly, of a preliminary nature.

1.3. In the consultation process I have encouraged delegations, in line with the guidance provided by the Director General at the Trade Negotiations Committee on 6 February, to adopt a problem-solving approach aimed at identifying opportunities for achieving greater convergence. In order to make progress it is important that we avoid simply identifying additional reasons as to why convergence is not possible – we must seek to go further and identify what options might be available to resolve difficulties. I consider that all delegations have approached these discussions in a constructive spirit and would encourage them to further deepen their constructive engagement with myself, as well as with other delegations who may not necessarily share their views, as the process evolves.

1.4. I will now outline a summary of the views expressed as well as my own observations on some of the points registered during the consultations.

2 SUMMARY OF VIEWS EXPRESSED

2.1. The consultations have highlighted a range of views from Members, as follows:

- There is broad recognition of the interconnected nature of the "core issues" of agriculture, NAMA and services which many Members have said should now be the focus of our efforts. There is also a strong recognition of the particular importance of agriculture within this mix. A number of delegations highlighted that agriculture was fundamental and central to the development dimension of the WTO, as well as to food security concerns, and emphasised the importance of continuing the ongoing reform process in agriculture commenced in the Uruguay Round. All of these aspects

¹ This report is circulated under the Chair's own responsibility and is without prejudice to the position of WTO Members in the negotiations.

² This is a reproduction of document JOB/GC/61 issued after the General Council on 14 March 2014.

necessitated that it be accorded appropriate priority. While some Members indicated that they were not "demandeurs" on agriculture, and did not consider agriculture a priority, these Members also recognised that it would be difficult to make progress on other issues without agriculture being accorded appropriate attention.

- Most Members acknowledged the interrelationship of the three pillars of agriculture-market access, domestic support and export competition- and the need for a balanced approach among them. While some Members place greater emphasis or priority on one or other of these three pillars, there is broad recognition that achieving progress across all three will be important and necessary to arrive at final outcomes across the agriculture negotiations.
- Among the three pillars Export Competition is recognised as an important priority for a large group of Members, as evidenced by the pre-Bali discussions and the Ministerial Declaration adopted in Bali. Many Members consider that this issue has been extensively discussed with clear landing zones identified now for several years.
- Many Members highlighted the importance they attached to the draft modalities (document TN/AG/W/4/Rev.4 and associated documents as referred to in TN/AG/26 of 21 April 2011) as a basis for further discussions and negotiations on agriculture. These Members noted that although this document had never been agreed, it had built on earlier Ministerial guidance, was well known in their capitals and reflected a range of discussions and compromises that had been made in the course of negotiations up to December 2008. Some other Members have, in contrast, placed emphasis on the need for further discussions not to be constrained by the draft modalities. They recall that the draft modalities have never been agreed and have stressed the importance of remaining open to new creative approaches to unresolved issues, as emphasised at MC8 and MC9, as well as ensuring that the discussions take account of more recent developments or trends in agricultural trade and policies.
- Ensuring that further discussions are assisted by appropriate updated data and information on member policies was highlighted by some Members. While this was not presented as a precondition to deepening engagement on substantive issues, it was suggested that appropriate information and experience sharing would greatly assist engagement and could help to build confidence.
- A number of delegations and groups took the opportunity to highlight their particular sensitivities and priorities within the negotiations. I received no indication that positions here had undergone any fundamental change from the last time discussions were active across the agriculture negotiations as a whole.
- Most delegations highlighted the importance of "balance" and "appropriate ambition" in any results that were to be agreed. But it is clear that there are a range of views as to what these elements amount to in terms of the different contributions Members or groups of Members should be expected to make. Some Members suggested that the architecture of draft options considered in the past was complex in some cases, with ambition in areas like market access being undermined by the application of an extensive range of exceptions and flexibilities. The point was also made that if success is to be achieved everyone will need to contribute rather than just expecting additional contributions from others.
- The need to ensure a coherent approach between the work within the Regular Committee on Agriculture to implement Bali outcomes and the ongoing work within the Special Session was also commented on. This was particularly so in regard to the work programme in the Regular Committee on a "permanent solution" to the public stockholding as well as the discussions and examination process in the Regular Committee on developments in Export Competition.

3 CHAIR'S OBSERVATIONS

3.1. This summary of views highlights the general, and in many cases rather tentative, views that have tended to feature in the consultative process up to the present. This reflects not only the early stage of renewed engagement with Members on "unfinished business" within agriculture but also the fact that it is clear that many Members do not yet have definitive views on a range of issues to which they are now turning their minds after a gap of some years. In a number of cases, Members underlined that they also want to know more about the positions that others may bring to the table before finalising their views. This too is understandable, and I hope it is a positive indication that Members are concerned to take an open rather than a closed approach to the discussions.

3.2. That said, developing greater clarity among Members on the substance of the issues within the agriculture pillar that remain to be resolved will need to be accorded greater priority if we are to make any progress. This will require deepened engagement from delegations in the period ahead in a variety of configurations. As I noted in my Introduction, I plan also to convene an open-ended meeting of the Special Session before the end of the month to provide a full opportunity for all Members to outline their views.

3.3. I believe that all of these discussions can be advanced without prejudice to the positions that various Members have in regard to the draft modalities document. The essential task remains to find through an honest, frank and pragmatic exchange of views how we can unlock progress, rather than remain at an impasse on issues that a large majority of Members continue to regard as fundamental.
