

Business priorities for the WTO - statement issued by the ICC and B20 Argentina at the 2018 WTO Public Forum

On 7 June 2018, representatives from companies and business associations from around the world met at WTO headquarters in Geneva for the [second Trade Dialogues](#) meeting, convened by the International Chamber of Commerce and the B20 Argentina. The ICC and the B20 very much welcomed the opportunity to express business views on the work of the WTO.

Intense discussions on e-commerce, investment facilitation, sustainable development and micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) led to the following set of recommendations to the WTO membership. The work on 7 June built on the progress made in these areas since the first Trade Dialogues meeting at WTO in May 2016.

Business is fully aware that global trade governance is being challenged and surrounded by uncertainty. It sent a strong and united message about the importance of the WTO and the need to strengthen and improve the system. Business hopes that these recommendations will contribute and reinforce global trade and investment in support of inclusive growth and development.

The list below, prepared under the responsibility of the ICC and B20 Argentina, stems from the recommendations made during the meeting of 7 June as well as a more detailed on-line follow-up exercise with a wider range of business representatives.

Importance of the trading system

1. Business representatives reaffirm their strong support for the WTO and stress that the stability, predictability and transparency provided by the multilateral trading system are crucial for supporting growth, development, and job creation.
2. Business underlines the need for ongoing multilateral negotiations and discussions at the WTO to ensure the system remains responsive and well-equipped to deal with trade-related and other modern, global economic issues. Business will continue to warn against the negative impact of protectionism and the dangers of undermining WTO's dispute settlement mechanism.
3. The Sustainable Development Goals enjoy very broad support among the business community. Business reiterates that trade and investment are important contributors to the delivery of these goals.
4. Business calls on WTO members and the secretariat to engage with the private sector in a more structured fashion, to improve consultation on regulatory policies, have a better understanding of priorities and identify best practices and policies that are not trade restrictive and fit for purpose.

E-commerce

1. E-commerce is of immense importance to trade and the global economy and business welcomes the launch of exploratory work towards future WTO negotiations. We encourage in-depth discussions and awareness-raising among WTO members on the issues of importance to the business community.
2. We call on WTO members to adopt a common and inclusive approach towards a coherent regulatory framework for e-commerce (this includes but is not limited to cross border data flows, data localization requirements, telecommunications, cybersecurity, collection of duties and taxes on e-commerce, and consumer protection). We further urge members to extend their agreement to not impose custom duties on electronic transmissions.
3. Business encourages WTO members to adopt and/or implement provisions that would facilitate and further develop e-commerce by eliminating non-tariff barriers such as improving customs procedures; TFA implementation; de minimis exemption; and facilitating electronic transactions (digital, paperless trading, online payment, e-signatures, e-contracts, legislation that accommodates blockchain development).
4. We call for the free flow of data across borders and avoiding localisation requirements subject to legitimate and non-discriminatory public policy exceptions. We further call for the protection of source code, algorithms and the prohibition of forced technology transfer. To build and maintain consumer trust and confidence, WTO members should adopt measures that protect consumers online and their personal information.
5. We call on members to fully explore goods and services market access relating to e-commerce, including but not limited to the further expansion of the Information Technology Agreement.
6. Business strongly calls for continued efforts to bridge the digital divide and address the infrastructural challenges faced by developing countries and LDCs. We call on the WTO to further cooperate with other international organisations to address the challenges and concerns.

Investment Facilitation

1. Business strongly encourages the WTO to capitalize on the ongoing engagement on regulatory cooperation in various forums and lead the way in aligning best regulatory practices to facilitate trade and investment.

2. The business community strongly supports the joint initiative on investment facilitation at the WTO, and stands ready to contribute to the development of a multilateral framework to facilitate investments.
3. Business believes a multilateral approach to address investment facilitation to be a cost-effective alternative to bilateral negotiations, which lead to further fragmentation of rules governing investment.
4. An Investment Facilitation Agreement should focus on transparency, predictability, non-discrimination, elimination of red tape, international cooperation, the creation of focal points to support foreign investors and the promotion and adoption of best practices.

MSMEs

1. Business recognizes the progress made through the Joint Initiative on MSMEs, and encourages increased dialogue between governments and the private sector.
2. Business urges WTO members to conduct regular monitoring of the impact of the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) on MSMEs, particularly on reducing the burdens created by regulatory requirements, and to explore ways to further simplify national processes and to ensure interoperability of digital single windows.
3. Business calls on WTO members to consider increasing customs import duty and tax exemption thresholds (de minimis levels) and eliminating duties on cross-border returns.
4. Business encourages WTO Members to actively support initiatives aimed at making trade-related information more readily accessible to MSMEs.
5. Business invites WTO Members to explore flexible international regulatory cooperation solutions to promote MSME participation in international trade, and to discuss regulatory measures that could be developed to enhance postal policies and internet liability regimes with a view to facilitating MSME trade.

Sustainable development

1. Business fully supports ongoing WTO work on fisheries subsidies and agriculture as well as initiatives on environmental goods and services. Business stands ready to actively participate to help finding appropriate and workable outcomes on these issues and calls to this end for more regular exchanges of information on the state of play and the implications of the negotiations.

2. Further work is needed to harmonize sustainability standards, labelling and certification, to improve transparency and to ensure their consistency with relevant WTO agreements. Business highlights the importance of moving towards regulatory coherence of those standards (eg. front of pack labelling, consumer care and others) that impact trade of agri-food, as well as other products, by strengthening the role of Codex and other relevant international standards in the definition of guiding principles. More harmonization and transparency will ensure adoption of least trade-restrictive measures while delivering legitimate public policy objectives.
3. Business recognize that trade can help unlock the benefits of the circular economy for jobs, prosperity and environmental sustainability. For trade to better support circular business models, harmonized definitions and rules on the transport and treatment of waste, as well as appropriate safety standards will be required.
4. In agriculture, business is convinced that continuing WTO negotiations will contribute to addressing the agriculture related SDGs, including achieving "zero hunger". In this respect business calls for advancement , eliminating or significantly reducing trade-distortive domestic support and agricultural export subsidies, and fully implementing negotiated WTO agreements regarding agriculture (including the Bali and Nairobi packages)