

ACP Statement for Meeting of TNC

20 July 2020

Thank You, Director General and the ACP Group thanks you for your Report.

The ACP Group welcomes the important steps which are being taken to find creative ways to consolidate and enhance progress in the WTO's work programme, as well as to continue our assessment of the WTO's role in the context of the global pandemic.

In that regard, we would also wish to convey our thanks to the Chairs of the negotiating groups for their reports.

Fisheries Subsidies Negotiations

On Fisheries Subsidies, we welcome the Chair's draft consolidated text. There are various issues to be discussed on process and substance, including issues not yet reflected in the document and the structure of our post-summer work programme, in light of the continued lockdown mode in most of our capitals, making it difficult or impossible for capital-based officials to contribute effectively.

We note that 2020 remains the target for conclusion. We urge that the Chair bears in mind the context within which we operate, that is, the further unfolding of the pandemic. It has become particularly difficult for large groups such as ours to coordinate without full access to the WTO premises and facilities of interpretation. We remain positively disposed to discuss further approaches to the fisheries subsidies negotiations and how our work can be best organized during this difficult time.

Agriculture

As regards Agriculture, the impact of the pandemic has confirmed our concerns over limited progress in agreeing mutually acceptable disciplines for Domestic Support including for cotton, PSH and SSM with appropriate special and differential treatment. Agriculture and food security are essential to the ACP Group and should not be relegated to the lower tier of priorities.

We remain open to dialogue on export restriction disciplines that takes into account the unique circumstances of developing countries. We look forward to working with the incoming Chair of CoA-ss and will assist in efforts for meaningful outcomes at MC12.

Development/Special and Differential Treatment

We reiterate the importance of continuing our discussions in the CTD SS at the earliest possible opportunity, including on the impact of COVID-19 on its work. We welcome the written submissions on JOB/DEV/60, JOB/TNC/79 and the subsequent questions and responses in document JOB/DEV/61. The ACP Group looks forward to the next CTD SS meeting where the updated documents can be discussed. This will be an important confidence building exercise as we ramp up our efforts towards MC12. In this regard, a clear work programme will enhance our work.

Services

Chair,

Services trade is a fundamental and growing feature of the ACP Group's economies. COVID-19 has brought about severe impacts on our economies such as loss of foreign exchange earnings, closure of key sectors such as tourism, and significant disruption in economic linkages.

The services sector is a priority sector for many ACP countries due to its contribution to GDP and jobs and the work in the CTS-SS must proceed in a manner that is sensitive to the vulnerabilities of developing countries and LDCs. The CTS should deliberate on an appropriate response to the impact of COVID-19, taking into account the sensitivities of services trade in developing countries and LDCs.

E-commerce

We recognize the benefits of e-commerce. The crisis highlighted the need to address the digital divide within and among countries. The WTO must provide adequate attention to transitioning developing countries and LDCs beyond being mere buyers in electronic commerce. This is essential for our MSMEs. We see value in continuing the conversation on and beyond the moratorium to cover issues such as revenue implications, the impact on our businesses, consumer welfare and the extent to which the temporary moratorium has impacted national ICT and industrial policies.

TRIPS

On TRIPS and public health, Covid-19 infections and fatalities are increasing at an alarming rate. The TRIPS Agreement should not hinder the discovery and production of the medicines we so urgently require. At the same time, we must

ensure that Members work together to facilitate mechanisms and schemes to provide global access to the vaccine and cure when they are available. We must understand better how the flexibilities of the TRIPS Agreement will foster access to the medicines for all needed to combat Covid-19.

WTO Reform

On reform, the ACP Group believes that the process and substance should accentuate the development dimension of international trade, complement the SDGs, be fair, transparent and inclusive. We note discussions among some members to find a resolution to the Appellate Body impasse. We urge caution against sub-plenary arrangements and reiterate the need for an outcome that is mutually acceptable and adopted in line with the consensus principle of the WTO.

The ACP pledges its commitment to continue to play a constructive role as we seek to ensure that the WTO responds to the challenges to the multilateral trading system.

Thank you, Chair!