
APEC business leaders to address strengthening of growth and resilience of APEC economies in 2013

Business leaders of the APEC Business Advisory Council (ABAC) met in Manila this week to set out their agenda and work program. This will culminate in recommendations to Ministers and Leaders that identify issues and suggest ways to deepen regional economic integration when they meet in October 2013 in Bali. ABAC was established in Manila in 1996.

Asia-Pacific business leaders who comprise the APEC Business Advisory Council (ABAC) gathered in Manila for the first of their four meetings in 2013 to flesh out their work agenda for the year. They agreed to pursue an agenda aimed at strengthening the underpinnings of the region's economic growth and resilience of at a time when the global economy is facing many short and long-term challenges. Under the theme of "Partnership, Resilience and Bridges to Growth", ABAC will develop recommendations on how APEC economies can deepen regional economic integration, promote infrastructure and sustainable development, foster small and micro enterprise development and entrepreneurship and promote the development and integration of financial markets. ABAC engaged APEC Senior Officials from 17 APEC economies in a dialogue to present their agenda and to identify areas for collaboration through the year.

ABAC noted the progress achieved by APEC in dismantling barriers at the border. Much work however remains in addressing beyond border barriers. "We need to take a bold and focused approach to doing things as the APEC agenda turns more and more from dismantling border barriers to the complexity of building institutions, the soft and hard infrastructure and the dynamics of integration. In the end our Leaders are interested in the dividends of the Bogor Goals of free and open trade and investment which are generated by business and people. " said Wishnu Wardhana, of Indonesia, ABAC Chair for 2013.

To this end, ABAC will place a stronger focus on investments, services trade and infrastructure development, areas that APEC has not given as much attention in the past as it has with its trade liberalization and facilitation agenda and for which it has already achieved notable success.

ABAC had proposed recommendations to strengthen FDI flows in 2011 and 2012 and for 2013 it has developed a work program to seek a solution from the broader perspective of a comprehensive improvement of the investment environment by sharing best practices.

Services contribute at least 50 per cent of GDP in all APEC economies and in some of the developed economies it is more than 90 per cent. Services trade and investment liberalization has therefore been a high priority of ABAC. It will continue to press for a new APEC initiative on services including developing new approaches and collaborating with others to advocate these new initiatives.

Meeting the region's enormous Infrastructure requirement is a challenge that ABAC is giving significant attention because of its impact on investments, job generation and supply chain connectivity. ABAC wants APEC to move beyond framework and best practices towards implementation.

Achieving the Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP) remains the end goal for APEC because it remains the most viable mechanism for achieving the Bogor Goal of free and open trade and investments. ABAC noted the progress made in the various pathways to FTAAP including TPP and

RCEP and proposed that action be taken to ensure that these pathways eventually converge into the FTAAP. ABAC was pleased to hear that the Philippines is engaged in the RCEP process but is also working towards being able to participate in the TPP process as well.

ABAC also will work in the further development of an APEC food security system through the Public Partnership for Food Security (PPFS). Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMME) development remain high in ABAC's priorities in recognition of the fact that it is the backbone of economic growth in most APEC economies. This year, ABAC will focus on solutions for SMMEs to overcome information, logistics and financial barriers. Increasing the participation of women in business with focus on promoting entrepreneurship and easing access to finance will also be given priority.

The business leaders met with President Benigno Aquino III in Malacanang during which they had a "fireside chat" where there was a lively discussion on regional economic issues including on services, SMMEs and innovation. The President expressed his appreciation for ABAC's work and looked forward to meeting them in November.

About ABAC

The APEC Business Advisory Council is the official voice of business in APEC. ABAC brings together business leaders from each of the APEC's 21 economies to identify policy priorities and key concerns of the business sector.

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