

ABAC STATEMENT ON THE WTO

Now, more than ever, the world needs a credible, relevant, and effective multilateral trading system, with the World Trade Organization (WTO) at its core. In this era of global challenges, the APEC Business Advisory Council (ABAC) recognizes that the WTO is instrumental in fostering prosperity, peace, stability, economic security, and equitable opportunities for all. We welcome the accession of two new members, Timor Leste and Comoros, as affirmation of this.

The global landscape is rapidly evolving, and so too must the WTO. The organization is uniquely positioned to develop the essential tools to combat pressing global risks such as trade distorting practices, rising unilateralism, climate change and food insecurity. But there is no WTO without its Members. Its effectiveness depends upon the unwavering support and commitment of us all.

A disappointing outcome is in prospect for the 13th WTO Ministerial Conference in Abu Dhabi. Instead, we urge APEC Ministers Responsible for Trade to work together to drive ambitious results. In particular, we call on APEC Ministers:

- To seek agreement on a permanent Moratorium on Customs Duties on Electronic Transmissions, in order to prevent the creation of new trade barriers in the digital economy which is so vital to growth, inclusion and sustainability in our interconnected communities. New tariffs would hit the most vulnerable the hardest, and work against economic development;
- To seek the immediate reinstatement of the Appellate Body and agreement to necessary reforms to the WTO's dispute settlement system, without which the WTO architecture of commitments, obligations and mutually beneficial opportunities is in jeopardy;
- To pursue meaningful reforms in agriculture and fisheries, including the substantial reduction and elimination of trade-distorting agriculture subsidies, the urgent ratification of the Fish Subsidies Agreement, and the conclusion of the Agreement's second phase, in order to avert the wanton destruction of the global commons and ensure fair competition and food security for all.

We also call on APEC Ministers to champion open plurilateral agreements, including the Joint Statement Initiatives. These initiatives provide pragmatic and innovative solutions to critical challenges. Three-quarters of the WTO's membership are participants. Attempts to derail these efforts undermine our shared goals of global development and prosperity. In particular, we urge APEC Ministers:

- To support full endorsement of the Investment Facilitation for Development Agreement and its integration into the WTO legal framework, which promises to unlock development, prosperity and sustainability in our region;
- To champion a package of substantive outcomes on E-Commerce this year, to enable economies to leverage the full benefits of the digital age, facilitate trusted cross-border data flows, mitigate the digital divide, and counter regulatory fragmentation; and
- To support initiatives that seek to enable trade effectively to address sustainability, including responding to climate change, the most urgent threat to humanity.

It is time for APEC economies to act decisively to support ambitious outcomes at MC13. Collectively, we can advance a trade environment that not only nurtures economic growth but is also responsive to the demands of our societies and the planet. This should be our legacy.

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