

General Council  
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## PROMOTION OF THE INSTITUTIONAL IMAGE OF THE WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

### Communication from Venezuela

The following communication, dated 1 February 1999, received from the delegation of Venezuela is circulated to WTO Members.

1 The WTO has not done enough to consolidate a positive institutional image. On the contrary, the WTO is increasingly perceived as a supranational power consisting of an impersonal and dogmatic bureaucracy pursuing its objectives relentlessly without taking account of possible impact in other areas. We need only consider the example of the public demonstrations that took place during the last Ministerial Meeting in Geneva. Similarly, arguments against the benefits of opening up trade are becoming increasingly prominent in the media. This distorted image is gaining ground in the developing and least-developed countries in particular, especially in the wake of the Asian financial crisis.

2 The possible consolidation of this negative institutional image of the WTO could have a negative impact on the organization's credibility and future development. For the delegations of the developing countries and the least-developed countries which are already having problems implementing the WTO Agreements, this situation is particularly delicate since we could see a generalization, at the different levels of power (executive, legislative, public opinion, media, etc.), of the tendency to reject the role and importance of the WTO. This situation is not unique to developing countries. There are many parallels in advanced economies.

3 Bearing in mind the content of paragraph 4 of the Ministerial Declaration of Geneva (May 1998), the delegation of Venezuela proposes that we consider the possibility of developing a fitting institutional image of the WTO, emphasizing that it is an organization directed by its Members, that its decisions are adopted by consensus, etc.

4 The promotion or dissemination of the institutional image of the WTO should follow two courses of action. The first would apply the guidelines and techniques used for the marketing of products, which implies using a wide range of media available. It would be wise to call on the services of corporate image specialists. At the same time, the WTO website could include a separate section in which information about the WTO is presented in a more "digestible" format for a broader public with little knowledge of international trade issues, i.e. a kind of WTO for beginners: a step-by-step guide.

5 The second course of action would be directed more specifically towards individuals or groups of persons with decision-making authority and/or able to influence public opinion in their respective countries. Here we suggest launching an information campaign focusing on the multilateral trading system specifically directed, *inter alia*, towards members of national legislatures or parliaments, business associations, consumer organizations and the media, especially television programmes which focus on economic and trade matters.

6 It is important that work on the initiatives described above begin as soon as possible and be underway well before the WTO's Third Ministerial Conference planned for the end of November 1999. While the WTO Secretariat already has an abundant amount of information material, it is clear for many WTO Members that more must be done at the national level to explain the WTO and the multilateral trading system it represents to the public and to key decision makers. We believe that the Secretariat could prepare a document that would focus on the best ways to build national support for the multilateral trading system and study ways of achieving such support, at national and regional levels, including:

- (a) to evaluate the possibility of a marketing campaign as described in paragraph 4, including its contents and cost;
- (b) to examine ways of assisting members with their national information campaigns in order to enhance public understanding of the WTO;
- (c) to present suggestions about what the Secretariat could do to achieve proposals mentioned in paragraphs 4 and 5.

7 The Secretariat could present to the General Council a draft report on the previous matters in the next 60 days, for further discussions.

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