

PRESS RELEASE

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THE NETHERLANDS DONATE 2.6 MILLION DUTCH GUILDERS TO WTO TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FUND

The Dutch government today pledged 2.6 million Dutch guilders (about CHF 1.9 million) for the period 2000-2001 to the Global Trust Fund for WTO Technical Assistance to benefit developing countries and economies in transition. On behalf of the Netherlands' Ministry for Economic Affairs, Director-General for Foreign Economic Relations, Mr. Dirk Bruinsma, signed a Memorandum of Understanding with WTO Director-General, Mike Moore.

"Funding technical assistance to help developing countries implement their WTO obligations is in all WTO Members' interest and no charity", said Mr. Bruinsma. "Technical assistance is certainly not the only solution to implementation problems but the least we can do is provide a minimum and stable source of funding. In the meantime we will work with the Director-General and other Members towards agreement about the Director-General's proposal to fund these activities from the regular WTO budget. There are no real excuses anymore for not taking this proposal forward."

"Once again, I am extremely grateful to the Netherlands for its donation to the Trust Fund", said Mike Moore. "Only through these types of generous contributions can the WTO respond now to an increasing demand for technical assistance. Unfortunately, the WTO's regular budget for technical assistance of CHF 741,000 is insufficient to meet all the requests from least developed countries and developing countries, and economies in transition."

The Netherlands' new contribution to the Global Trust Fund follows an earlier contribution in January 1997 when the Netherlands donated 4 million Dutch guilders (around CHF 2.9 million). The Netherlands also launched in 1998 the "Hands-on WTO work" trainee programme, allowing developing country officials to acquire "on-the-job" experience while working in the WTO Secretariat for a year.

The Director-General has called on WTO Members governments to raise the regular budget for technical assistance. A group of countries, including the Netherlands, has proposed a phased increase in the regular budget of CHF 10 million earmarked for technical assistance.