

PRESS RELEASE

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MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ENDS WITH AGREEMENT ON NEW PROGRAMME

Ministers from WTO member governments approved a work programme — which they called “broad and balanced” — that includes negotiations on a range of subjects and other tasks for the coming years.

“The success of our conference at this difficult time is ... especially important as a reaffirmation of the determination of the international community to work together to respond to these challenges for a better future, said Conference chairman, Qatari Finance, Economy and Trade Minister Youssef Hussain Kamal.

Director-General Mike Moore said: “This conference has been a remarkable experience for all of us. It has been difficult, because we have been dealing with some of the most sensitive issues in international trade policy, and many governments have had to move towards the positions of their partners to make this agreement possible.

“I have been impressed by the readiness which so many ministers have shown to understand and accommodate the needs of others, and by the strength of the common determination to make the conference a success — not just for the sake of national interests, but very much because everybody appreciated the need to give a signal of confidence in this very difficult time of international uncertainty.”

The work programme, spelt out in two declarations — a main declaration and one on intellectual property (TRIPS) and public health — and one decision on implementation — i.e. developing countries’ difficulties in implementing current WTO agreements.

The main ministerial declaration includes elaboration of objectives and timetables for the current negotiations in agriculture and services, negotiations or possible negotiations in a range of issues such as industrial tariffs, trade and investment, trade and competition policy, some aspects of trade and the environment, implementation, and so on.

The declaration gives a boost to developing countries and commits ministers to address “the particular vulnerability of least developed countries and the special structural difficulties they face in the global economy”. Numerous items in the work programme deal with this.

MORE

Negotiations under the work programme are to be concluded not later than 1 January 2005. The only exception is the negotiation on improving and clarifying the Dispute Settlement Understanding, which is to conclude by the end of May 2003.

Other elements of the work programme are to be concluded by the end of 2002 or by the next Ministerial Conference — the conferences have to take place at least once every two years.

The declaration on TRIPS and public health spells out ministers' recognition of various flexibilities that the agreement gives to governments to deal with health problems. It also sets out sets out specific tasks for the WTO TRIPS Council.

Agreement was reached on 14 November after all-night consultations on remaining disagreements.

Meanwhile ministers agreed to grant the European Union a waiver from its non-discrimination obligations, in order to enable it give preferential tariff concessions to the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries that are former colonies of its member states.

Agreement on this also required intensive consultations because of concerns raised by some developing countries that are not ACP members.

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