



12 June 2022

(22-4444)

Page: 1/2

**Ministerial Conference
Twelfth Session
Geneva, 12-15 June 2022**

Original: English

**STATEMENT BY HON. MR RAMON CERVANTES
MINISTER OF STATE, MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
FOREIGN TRADE, AND IMMIGRATION**

BELIZE

Importance of MC12 in the context of numerous global uncertainties

Colleagues, Belize congratulates all WTO Members on convening this historic twelfth Ministerial Conference. I thank and recognize the Chair of this conference – Kazakhstan, alongside the co-host Switzerland, for persevering that Ministers convene today. I also recognize the stellar and stabilizing leadership of our Director General, Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala. Since taking the helm of this organization in 2021, your efforts have brought about renewed engagement, and a credible sense of urgency to the important work of the WTO. Congratulations to you and your team!

This 12th Ministerial Conference comes literally at a most critical juncture for the world. As we have all witnessed, trade, and the smooth functioning of the multilateral trading system, continue to be affected by numerous global challenges; from the devastating effects of climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic to the ongoing war in Ukraine, which all threaten global food security. Therefore, this conference cannot and must not be ordinary; we must show resolve, and flexibility in order to deliver for our people and the planet, which depend on a functioning multilateral trading system.

Belize aligns itself with the ACP Declaration, and with the Statement to be delivered on behalf of the CARICOM Group.

WTO Reform

In recent times, Belize has observed keenly the challenges facing the multilateral trading system. We have seen the gradual deterioration of the negotiating function of the WTO, and the crippling of the Appellate Body. The inability to agree on issues gives rise to forum shifting away from the WTO. The WTO remains one of the most democratic Member-driven global institutions, and we must strive to make it better, and more responsive to changing global challenges.

Therefore, Belize supports reform of the WTO. Such reform must adhere to the principles of transparency, inclusiveness, consensus-based decision-making, fairness, and equity in the rights and obligations of WTO Members. The reform should also promote greater linkages between trade rules and development.

Response to Pandemic

It is unfortunate that the WTO has not been able to respond effectively to the COVID-19 pandemic. At the height of the pandemic, vaccine nationalism and inequity prevailed; and some Members grew comfortable with the imposition of export restrictions on essential products. These developments are at variance with the global solidarity that was required to decisively deal with the pandemic. As an organization, we must learn from experience and develop a mechanism to respond to future pandemics in a timely and effective manner.

Such mechanism should facilitate technology transfers, technical assistance, and capacity building for developing countries and Least-Developed Countries.

TRIPS Waiver

Belize recognizes the progress that has been made in the discussions on the TRIPS waiver. We emphasize that any waiver beyond the existing TRIPS flexibilities should make sure that states with limited or no production capacity, like CARICOM states, are able to import patented vaccines and other medications and share these supplies within their region. We support those clarifications of existing flexibilities to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and future pandemics. The waiver must be fair, inclusive, and accessible to developing countries, especially LDCs.

Fisheries subsidies

For over a decade, an agreement has eluded the WTO on the removal of harmful fisheries subsidies; this is reflective of the challenges prevailing in the negotiating function of the WTO. As an organization, we must make the necessary changes. For Belize, the fisheries negotiations remain high on the agenda as we are rolling out our blue economy plan. With Small Island Developing States like Belize posing negligible impact on IUU fishing, it is imperative that sufficient policy space and technical support be given to us to support the growth of sustainable fishing industries and the improvement of monitoring systems.

Agriculture and food security

A substantive agreement has eluded the WTO. While the divergence of Members interest is understood, Members must be flexible in negotiation. Belize calls for an outcome on agriculture that achieves a permanent solution on public stockholding for food security purposes that includes all products and has food security as its objective. In addition, an outcome on agriculture must preserve the policy space for developing countries.

Belize will support proposals aimed at eliminating export restrictions on food items, including food purchased for humanitarian purposes by the World Food Programme.

In closing, we must do our citizens justice and address a most urgent matter for economic recovery - the rise in the cost of living. Rising shipping costs have increased the cost of living in Belize, hindering our post-pandemic recovery, even though we have shown tremendous resilience in recovering from the 2020 economic fallout. We therefore urge Members, especially from developed countries, and the WTO Secretariat to make all efforts for immediate resolution of the issue of rising shipping rates. Failure to do so will further imperil the welfare of our people, especially those struggling on the margins of our society. Belize looks forward to working with you over the coming days, as we advance issues in our common interest.
