

## Members Set November 30<sup>th</sup> as New MC8 Agenda Deadline

The General Council chairman, Nigerian Ambassador, Yonov Frederick Agah, convened an informal meeting of the general council on November 24<sup>th</sup> to update the full Membership on the status of the 8<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference (MC8) agenda. “Given the general understanding that MC8 is not to going be a negotiating meeting, and the need to provide for adequate preparation for your Ministers, there is a need for us to take stock of where we have got to sufficiently in advance of the Ministerial,” Agah said.

He went on to report on his consultations on the importance of multilateral trading system (MTS) and WTO, claiming that he sensed convergence on the need to strengthen the MTS and to make the organisation more responsive to Members’ needs, especially in these times of global economic crises. Members also agreed to reaffirm the importance of the WTO in keeping protectionism at bay.

It is believed that consensus on issues such as TRIPS (trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights) Non-Violation and e-commerce has already been reached. Delegates also support efforts to facilitate accession of LDCs to the WTO. However, Agah remained cautious, describing all the elements he reported as “work in progress”.

“They represent a possible minimum level of convergence but clearly we cannot claim that they are agreed yet,” the Nigerian Ambassador said, adding that his consultations have shown that “convergence becomes more elusive the higher the level of specificity.”

Indeed, Members want to see all three pillars – the importance of the Multilateral Trading System and the WTO; Trade and Development and the Doha Development Agenda, which is under the responsibility of the Director-General – detailed before they can provide their full support. Officials say the rest of the items for the MC8 agenda are still being discussed, i.e. Net Food Importing Developing Countries’ proposal, Australian proposal on Regional Trade Agreements, EU’s export restriction for World Food Program or the tariff standstill proposal to name a few.

There is a genuine desire to achieve convergence on the MC8 agenda, one official said. However, this informal meeting was about providing clarity as to where Members stand as the current process to establish the ministerial agenda has been going on for some time now, missing the original deadline of November 2<sup>nd</sup>.

As such, Members agreed to set the November 30<sup>th</sup> General Council meeting as the de facto deadline to agree on the remaining items so there are no surprises left to ministers at next month’s conference. “I have heard from many delegations that this means the General Council of 30 November. Their view is that whatever level of convergence we have reached by then on the elements of political guidance in all three areas — systemic, development and DDA — will be what goes to the Ministers for their endorsement. This would be in line with the ‘no surprises’ principle,” Agah said.

Another element that also drew lots of support is the idea to have a Chair’s statement rather than a declaration (which is related to a negotiation) to be issued at the end of the MC8, mostly because there is not a lot of time remaining to negotiate before the start of the Ministerial Conference.

The MC8 Chair’s statement will likely be divided into two parts, elements on which Members have reached consensus (which they will close by November 30<sup>th</sup>), and the MC8 Chair’s summary of the main points he has heard in the Ministerial discussions

Members broadly agreed with Agah's proposal to set November 30<sup>th</sup> as the deadline for final MC8 agenda items and to have a Chair's statement released at the end of the Ministerial.

## GPA Talks in Trouble

Hope to secure a deal on the Government Procurement Agreement (GPA) is currently threatened by a lack of agreement between the U.S. and the EU on the subject.

"We have suffered a few setbacks; I have to be very honest". "The overall balance between the three major parties of this agreement is still something they are searching for. Several times in the recent past I was under the impression the parties were very close to finding that overall balance, but they are still searching," the GPA chair, Nicolas Niggli said.

Niggli declared On November 15<sup>th</sup>, after GPA consultations at heads of delegations level, that parties involved in the plurilateral agreement were "very close" to concluding the negotiations for a new agreement that would mean expanded coverage, increased market access and more efficient disciplines. At that time, the EU informed Members that it was "very close" to close a deal with the U.S. and both governments were in contact on a daily basis to discuss the final modalities.

Yet, sources said the problem seems to derive from differences between the U.S. and the EU over the removal of Georgia from the list of U.S. states that are expected to observe the GPA regulations. Sources said the U.S. ambassador, Michael Punke, told his fellow negotiators that his country was unlikely to make any additional offers which prompted fears of eradicating progress made the past few years. It is believed that a deal passed between the 3 major players in these negotiations i.e. the U.S., the EU and Japan, will pave the way for a global agreement on GPA by the time of the MC8.

The chair said he postponed the GPA next meeting to the week of December 5<sup>th</sup> in order to give the EU, U.S. and Japan more time to work on their divergences.

"If we don't have a result by then, my prerogative as the Chair is to ask Ministers to come in a little bit earlier to deal with this," Niggli declared, adding that unless major players start moving towards each other and showing more pragmatism and realism, "we will be in a dangerous situation."

## Upcoming Events

- WTO General Council, November 30- December 1, 2011
- WTO Ministerial Conference (MC8), December 15-17, 2011
- Regular Agriculture Committee, March 21-22; June 20-21, September 26-27, 2012

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