



## Dialogue on the Functioning of the WTO: Development Challenges and Policy Options

### ICTSD-WTI Expert Group Meeting

28 February-1 March 2013

International Environment House 2, Chemin de Balexert 7-9, 1219 Geneva, Room Rhône

#### Agenda

##### Thursday 28 February

9:00-9:15 **The E15 Initiative – Process and Purpose**

- Ricardo MELÉNDEZ ORTIZ (ICTSD)

9:15-9:45 **Session I: The functioning of the WTO, Issues and Concerns**

Chair: Christophe BELLMANN (ICTSD)

- Manfred ELSIG (WTI): Presentation of the background paper
- Victor DO PRADO (WTO): State of Play in the WTO

*There has been considerable debate as to whether institutional reform is needed - and in what form - ever since the WTO was first established. While some proposals have been introduced by governments, others have been put forward by academia, research institutes, civil society and other international organizations. The multilateral system itself has not been static in the face of these demands. Reforms - or incremental change - have happened on a number of fronts, including at management level, in external transparency, public participation in dispute settlement proceedings or in the way in which negotiations are conducted.*

*This presentation will provide participants with an overview of key issues and concerns regarding the functioning of the WTO. Issues to be covered include the negotiating function of the WTO and the various mechanism that are or could be used to make it more efficient (single undertaking vis-a-vis plurilateral agreements, participation in informal consultations, countries coalitions, etc); the regular work of WTO Committees; and the involvement of the business community in WTO activities, a subject to which so far little attention has been given.*

10:30-13:00 **Open discussion**

13:00-14:00 **Lunch**

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14:00-18:00 **Session II: Break-out groups on specific sub-themes**

*For this session, participants will split into three groups. Each group will go through three successive iterations during which they will discuss three different topics namely (i) the negotiating function of the WTO, (ii) the work of the regular committees and (iii) the participation of the private sector. Each topic will be briefly introduced by a resource person who will be rotating from one group to the other as the group goes through its different iterations. This will allow participants to contribute to each topic.*

**Topic 1      The negotiating function of the WTO: Adapting to changing economic realities**

**Resource person:** Carolyn DEERE BIRKBECK, Global Economic Governance Programme, University College, Oxford

*After ten years of complex and unfinished Doha negotiations, characterised by missed deadlines and few substantive dividends, critics have argued that the WTO's established principles and practices of decision-making, carried over from the GATT, are simply ill-suited to the fast changing challenges of our times. In recent years, discussions have focused on issues such as the need to rethink the single undertaking principle with proposals such as "variable geometry agreements" including the so-called "plurilateral" and "critical mass" agreements. Ensuring that such approaches don't constitute a substitute for multilateral negotiations but rather a way to re-energise and ultimately help complete the Doha Round is critical in this respect. This group will explore possible avenues to enhance the effectiveness of the negotiating function of the WTO while maintaining its legitimacy and inclusiveness.*

**Topic 2      The work of WTO Committees: Transparency and participation**

**Resource person:** Guillermo VALLES, Director, Division on International Trade in Goods and Services and Commodities (DITC), UNCTAD

*Beyond negotiations, years of near-exclusive focus on the Doha Round have inhibited institutional evolution, to the point of diminishing some of the WTO's permanent, non-negotiating functions, such as the work of its regular committees. In the run up to the 2009 Ministerial Conference, several proposals were put on the table to strengthen the work of WTO committees. These covered a variety of issues such as the need to enhance the WTO trade information system by including data on non-tariff barriers; monitor developments in regional trade agreements (RTAs) and develop non-binding best practice guidelines for negotiating new RTAs; optimize the effects of peer-pressure through the trade policy review mechanism, establish an "omnibus legal system" that would address all forms of preferential market access for LDCs in a coherent way; or address the increasing role of standards and standard-setting bodies in international trade. This break-out group will discuss possible ways to strengthen the work of the regular WTO committees.*

**Topic 3      The WTO and the Private Sector: The business dimension of trade**

**Resource person:** Reinhard QUICK, German Chemical Industry Association

*The slow pace of multilateral trade negotiations over the last ten years has partly eroded the willingness of private sector actors to invest time and resources in multilateral trade negotiations. Yet, engaging with large and small business in both developed and developing countries is likely to play a critical role in re-energising the Doha*

*Round and ensuring that the WTO effectively responds to today's business concerns such as the operations of global supply chains or the proliferation of preferential trade agreements. As opposed to most international negotiating and deliberating fora such as the G20, APEC or the UNFCCC, there is no systematic engagement or structured interaction between the WTO and the private sector. This group will explore possible options and mechanisms to foster a more systematic and representative engagement of business with the multilateral trading system.*

## Friday 1 March

### 9:30-11:00 **Session III: Reports from break-out groups**

Chair: Ricardo MELÉNDEZ ORTIZ (ICTSD)

- Resource persons will present main conclusions of the different group discussions on the three topics.

#### **Open discussion**

### 11:00-11:30 **Coffee break**

### 11:30-12:30 **Session IV: Translating ideas into action**

- Manfred ELSIG (WTI)
- Ricardo MELÉNDEZ ORTIZ (ICTSD)

*In this session, participants will share and explore proposals for ensuring that the expert group process actively informs domestic and international policy-making, negotiations and decision-making on the functioning of the WTO and possible WTO reform in the selected areas.*

12:30 Shuttle leaving to Restaurant Vieux-Bois

13:00 – 15:00 **A Conversation between Ministers** Mari PANGESTU and Tim GROSER and the E15 Group on Functioning of the WTO