



Inter-Parliamentary Union

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Speech by IPU Secretary General Martin Chungong

Panel on the Commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the WTO

19 November 2020

Excellencies, Dear Members of the Governing Council
Dear Deputy Directors General
Dear Yunov,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for inviting me to the celebration of this important event, the 25th anniversary of the WTO. It gives me great pleasure to be here with you.

Having witnessed the evolution of the WTO over the past 25 years, we are in a position to say that the WTO is the pillar of our global rules-based trading system and it is with binding rule-making and adjudication powers. WTO rules and agreements reach deep into domestic and regional affairs. The WTO has positioned itself as a forum where stakeholders discuss and cooperate; it is a body which mainstreams trade in the different sectors of activity.

That is to say the WTO's main purpose is to uphold the rule of law in international trade to help reduce poverty and create prosperity by lowering the barriers to trade worldwide.

At the IPU, we very much value our cooperation with the WTO, in particular in the context of the Parliamentary Conference that was set up nearly 20 years ago as a joint initiative of the IPU and the European Parliament.

Since then, the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO, known as PCWTO, has brought together legislators from all over the world who, as members of parliament, specialize in international trade and finance in standing and select committees in their respective parliaments. They gather on the occasion of the WTO Ministerial Conference to contribute to the discussions on a fair and equitable global trading system that should meet people's needs.

To support WTO's work, the PCWTO's core objective is to serve as a forum for the exchange of opinions, information and experience, as well as for the promotion of common parliamentary action in the area of international trade.

As part of this process, parliamentarians help:

- Oversee and promote the effectiveness and fairness of WTO activities
- Promote the transparency of WTO procedures and enhance dialogue between governments, parliaments and civil society
- Build capacity in parliaments on matters of international trade
- Inform discussions at the WTO from a parliamentary perspective.

As an example of our concrete collaboration, we are proud to have contributed to sensitizing parliamentarians to ratify the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) thus paving the way for this treaty to enter into force on 22 February 2017. We serve as a conveyor belt between the WTO and national parliaments relaying the recommendations of the WTO Ministerial Conferences to the ground.

Then comes the time of turbulence, when multilateralism and the very functioning of the WTO are at risk. The WTO Appellate Body which has a fundamental role in the efficiency of the overall WTO system and in ensuring compliance with WTO rules so as to avoid resorting to unilateral measures, is undergoing a profound crisis which is blocking the work of the Dispute Settlement Body.

We all do recognize that trade is one of the key instruments in combatting poverty, and should an engine of growth for all. But the benefits of trade still don't reach as many people as they should. This feeds the disaffection and loss of confidence of the population in the global trading system accused of serving only the rich and deepening inequalities.

We are witnessing a withdrawal to behind national borders through protectionist policies that are not sustainable. Today's world is so interconnected and interdependent that protectionism no longer has its place there.

As if this was not enough, the disastrous COVID-19 pandemic is having a severe negative impact on the global economy and global trade, with further spill-over effects on people's welfare. It is plunging many into extreme and multidimensional poverty.

However, I am confident that with its future leadership the WTO will turn these challenges into opportunities. In this perspective, this is what I see to be the way forward which would also include parliamentary involvement:

1. Undertake global trade and WTO reforms in the context of efforts to strengthen the role of multilateralism, restore and enhance transparency and inclusivity. This calls for greater emphasis on a rules-based, open, transparent, fair and non-discriminatory multilateral trading system, respected by all.
2. Accelerate discussions to make the Appellate Body and Dispute Settlement Body fully operational.
3. As technology and innovation along with automation are also the driving forces of the economic revolution that sustains growth and development, harness technology in order to enhance productivity and inclusive growth and to achieve a human-centered society.
4. Make sustainable development the heart of multilateral trade negotiations and give priority to developing and least developed countries with a special focus on the concerns and interests of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises as creators of jobs.

5. Increase connectivity and capacity-building for e-commerce and create a policy framework that facilitates digital trade which contribution to trade and to global economy in general keeps on growing.
6. Ensure that trade liberalization and rules positively impact the position of women and girls to create an enabling regulatory environment that would allow lenders to make micro credit instruments more accessible to women and young people.

For an efficient parliamentary support to the different points I mentioned above, may I specifically call for the official recognition of the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO as an important contributor to the work of the WTO. It has indeed an important role in enabling efficient parliamentary support to this way forward. As a transmission belt, the PCWTO, through the IPU and the European Parliament, could provide a substantive contribution to its achievement.

The challenges facing the WTO show that there is a need for the continued involvement of parliamentarians. The latter can provide an enabling legislative environment facilitate the allocation of resources for the implementation of related policies and programmes while overseeing their implementation. As elected representatives of the people, parliamentarians are well-placed to listen to and convey the concerns and aspirations of citizens, businesses and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), thus enhancing the transparency of the WTO and strengthening public support for open trade. Needless to add, parliamentarians can contribute to a well-informed and honest debate by highlighting the multiple benefits of multilateral trade.

Thank you for your attention.