

# WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

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General Council

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## PREPARATIONS FOR THE 1999 MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE

### Organization and Management of the Work Programme

#### *Communication from Singapore*

The following communication, dated 8 July 1999, has been received from the Permanent Mission of Singapore.

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1. As a co-sponsor of the proposal on the organization and management of the work programme (WT/GC/W/230) which has just been introduced formally by the Australian delegation, the Singapore delegation would like to elaborate its views on the proposal.
  2. Significant statements and ideas have been made about how some of us see the scope, structure and time-frame of new negotiations that are to be launched in year 2000. The next question is how we could structure the format and content of the future work programme so as to achieve what we separately or collectively aspire.
  3. In the view of the Singapore delegation, we need to address the following specifics.

#### **Scope**

4. The scope by its very nature has to be proposals-driven. Some proposals are already on the table and are being addressed by the General Council sitting in special sessions. We have the mandated negotiations in agriculture and services to begin in year 2000. These must take place together with market opening in other areas such as industrial tariffs, and the need to evolve new rules to adapt to rapid changes in the trading environment and new technology.

5. The crucial issue is to how to decide on a scope that would meet the balanced interests of all WTO Members. Not all issues are ready for negotiations. Obviously some are more advanced and mature than others, like agriculture and services. Yet there are issues for which we cannot foresee the end result at this stage, but which are important enough not to be excluded from a balanced negotiating package. There is also the question of the intensity and the level of ambitions that we hope to achieve for each negotiating issue. This could be broadly defined in the parameters on each negotiating topic that we have to decide upon at Seattle.

#### **Modalities**

6. The Uruguay Round negotiations were conducted on the premise of a single undertaking with a common deadline. It took eight years to conclude. At Marrakesh, Ministers therefore decided that to avoid overloading the agenda and recurring crises, they should meet once in two years. This would

also provide a pressure relief valve to enable Ministers to adjust the course and direction from time to time.

7. But if past negotiations serve as a guide, the reality of negotiations is that at least in practice, the progress could best be advanced and results assured if negotiations were conducted as a single undertaking with an imposed deadline. Otherwise, progress would often slow down to a crawl.

8. But the biennial Ministerial meetings are a new institution that we could harness to provide for new dynamism in WTO work programme and negotiations, in two ways. First, they will provide an occasion during the intervening period for Ministers to approve results that are ripe for conclusion. Second, they would enable us to take stock and to review the progress of the negotiations and decide what could further be done to goad the process along.

### **Fulfilment of past promises**

9. It is also important that the Seattle Ministerial Declaration should clearly indicate results of what we have set out to do at the Singapore and Geneva Ministerial meetings. I may recount the following.

- First, as agreed in Geneva in May last year, we need to have a collective evaluation of implementation of what we have committed to do during the Uruguay Round, how it has fared and the reasons for perceived satisfaction or failures. We may need to take some collective decisions as to how to address the systemic problems in order to overcome the deep concerns of the developing countries.
- Second, there has to be progress report on the Plan of Action for the least-developed countries which we have agreed in Singapore and Geneva.

### **Bench-marking for results**

10. In the view of the Singapore delegation, Ministerial meetings should not be regarded as mere administrative board meetings. They can take decisions that would bench-mark progress or results in two areas:

- The first would range from simple house-keeping decisions like renewal of mandates of working groups to those which would improve the efficacy of the WTO system, such as procedures in dispute settlement.
- The second would relate to market access results and break-throughs in WTO rule-making areas.

### **Market signal**

11. Last but not least, it is vital that the Seattle Declaration should send the right signal to the market on what the Trade Ministers feel about the international trading environment and prospects for further global liberalization. At the very least, there should be a reaffirmation of Ministers' collective commitment to keep up the momentum of multilateral trade liberalization by launching a new round.

12. In conclusion, the Singapore delegation would like to stress that we need to ensure that the scope of the balanced package should be manageable and bring about tangible results within a reasonable period of three years. That would be the most crucial decision that the Ministers have to take at Seattle.