

PREPARATIONS FOR THE 1999 MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE

Electronic Commerce
Draft Text for the Ministerial Declaration

Communication from Australia

The following communication, dated 6 October 1999, has been received from the Permanent Mission of Australia.

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1. Ministers emphasize the benefits and new opportunities for international trade and economic growth in the continuing, rapid development of electronic commerce. Ministers draw particular attention to the benefits for developing countries and for smaller enterprises, in reducing production, marketing and transaction costs, and in eliminating barriers imposed by geography and distance in gaining a global presence in the marketplace.
 2. Ministers commend the results of the WTO's Work Programme on electronic commerce, as a comprehensive guide to the trade-related issues relating to global electronic commerce. Ministers conclude that the WTO Work Programme effectively demonstrates the applicability of existing trade rules to electronic commerce, and the value of maintaining the guideline of technological neutrality in the application of those rules, bearing in mind also the impossibility of establishing a distinct regulatory domain for international trade transacted through electronic commerce technologies.
 3. Ministers note that, insofar as the results of the Work Programme demonstrate a need for further action, that work will be taken forward in sectoral negotiations, particularly in the mandated negotiations on services, as well as in the specialized work on classifications and scheduling guidelines currently under way.
 4. Ministers highlight the need for Members to be actively engaged in development of emerging international norms for conduct of electronic commerce (including through the Work Programmes of UNCITRAL and WIPO), and to pay regard to these norms in the formulation of national regulatory arrangements.
 5. Ministers declare that Members will continue indefinitely their current practice of not imposing customs duties on electronic transmissions.
 6. In this context, Ministers emphasize the importance of ensuring fair and equitable access to the international electronic commerce infrastructure.
 7. Ministers recognize the need for technical assistance to ensure that developing countries are fully able to take advantage of the benefits of electronic commerce, in training, establishment of networks, infrastructure development and development of business structures adapted to the digital environment.
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