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# ANNUAL 2008 SESSION OF THE PARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE ON THE WTO

Geneva, 11-12 September 2008

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*Organized jointly by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the European Parliament*

## **OUTCOME DOCUMENT** *adopted by consensus on 12 September 2008*

1. We, parliamentarians assembled in Geneva for the annual session of the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO, are disappointed and concerned about the failure of the WTO ministerial meetings convened in Geneva at the end of July 2008. The establishment of modalities for agriculture and non-agricultural market access (NAMA) could have been a breakthrough - albeit not perfect - towards the conclusion of the Doha Round.
2. We understand the difficulties of a Single Undertaking, and we are encouraged that substantial progress was made to reach that goal, bringing WTO members close to finalizing the agreement. Solutions have been found to a very large number of problems which had remained intractable for years, even though the intensive negotiations foundered on the extent to which developing countries would be able to raise tariffs to protect farmers from import surges under a "special safeguard mechanism" (SSM), and some other issues remained unsolved. We recognize that there are differences in views and that the right balance between the different interests has obviously not been struck; we call attention to the need to continue to give priority to the vital interests of developing countries in keeping with the common commitment of all WTO members to a "development round".
3. We reaffirm our commitment to the multilateral trading system embodied in the WTO, which contributes to enhanced security, transparency and stability in international trade and to a better management of globalisation through multilateral rules and disciplines and the judicial settlement of disputes. The world needs more than ever a fair, equitable and transparent multilateral trading system, which is the most effective means of expanding and managing trade for the benefit of all, especially the developing countries.
4. In the current context, characterised by the soaring prices of raw materials and agricultural products, a successful conclusion of the Doha Round could be the robust stabilizing factor needed by a world increasingly worried about financial and economic crises and an important parameter in stimulating worldwide economic growth, development and employment. This is even more urgent in order to address new global challenges relating to food security, energy and climate change. Furthermore, it would strongly contribute to the Millennium Development Goals and to the integration of developing countries into the global trading system.
5. The costs of failure of the WTO negotiations would include: the loss of possible welfare gains from new WTO reforms; the serious threat of undermining the credibility of the international trading system and the WTO; the risk of expanding trade protectionism and that WTO members replace multilateralism with bilateral and regional agreements. The poorest and weakest members, who benefit among others from a strong multilateral rules-based system, would be the most disadvantaged.

6. We emphasize that the Doha Round should deliver on development, including duty-free quota-free access of LDCs to all developed country markets - substantially reducing agricultural subsidies - aid for trade, trade facilitation, and special and differential treatment, as well as better rules that allow for the necessary policy space to pursue sustainable development goals. Developing countries would not be able to achieve these elements at the same level in the framework of fragmented regional and bilateral deals. We believe that special attention must be paid to the responsibility of the developed countries to assist those developing countries and LDCs which need support through trade-related technical assistance and capacity-building.

7. We encourage WTO members to preserve the positive achievements made in all the areas of the talks, which should not be wasted, and to restart the negotiations as soon as possible on the basis of what has been achieved so far, showing flexibility and readiness to be constructive and positively engaged to find a resolution that is beneficial to all.

8. The WTO will need to engage in institutional reform aimed at improving its functioning, and enhancing its accountability and democratic legitimacy. We reiterate that the negotiations process should be based on a bottom-up, transparent and inclusive approach and that consensus must be preserved as a cornerstone of WTO decision-making. Moreover, we call for greater coherence between the objectives and rules of the WTO and the commitments made under other international conventions and agreements.

9. We underscore the importance of making the WTO a truly universal organization and call for the removal of political barriers that stand in the way of ensuring its inclusiveness and universal membership. Therefore, we invite all WTO members to facilitate and accelerate the accession process for developing countries. These countries should not be obliged to accept concessions that are incompatible with their level of development and that go beyond prevailing WTO rules. In particular, the accession process for LDCs should be carried out in accordance with the Guidelines on accession of LDCs issued by the WTO General Council.

10. We reiterate our commitment to provide a strong and effective parliamentary dimension to the WTO: the days when trade policy was the exclusive domain of the executive branch are over. The negotiation of future multilateral, regional and bilateral agreements must fully involve the parliaments in order to preserve transparency and parliamentary scrutiny in accordance with the laws of each WTO member.

11. We believe it is crucial for parliaments to exercise ever more vigorously and effectively their constitutional functions of oversight and scrutiny of government action, notably in the area of international trade. As parliamentarians, we are committed to play a far greater role than ever before in overseeing WTO activities and promoting the fairness of the trade liberalization process. It remains our joint responsibility, as members of parliament representing the interests of the people, to oversee government action in the field of international trade and promote fairness of trade liberalization.

12. We remind government negotiators of the commitments they made at the launch of the Round. What we now need is real leadership and courage. We are committed to doing our part. We urge our government negotiators to close the deal, that is on the table since July, before the end of the year so that the Doha Development Round can be concluded in 2009, with an outcome that gives real meaning to development and secures a balance of benefits to all members.