

The Global Dialogue on Trade is a collective and unique initiative established to contribute to the on-going, intergovernmental approach to reforming the World Trade Organization (WTO) and making the multilateral rules-based trade system fit-for-purpose in the 21st century.

In October 2018, International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) Secretary General John W.H. Denton AO and World Trade Organization Secretary General Roberto Azevedo launched the Global Dialogue on Trade to facilitate open discussions between stakeholders from business, multilateral organisations and academia.

ICC received close to 70 submitted themes for discussion from participants around the world. After careful consideration, ICC selected three topics of discussion facing the global trade system today: (1) How to deal with trade distorting practices (2) How to take account of the growing importance of e-commerce to global trade (3) Flexible multilateralism: What role for plurilateral and other negotiating tools?

Since the launch of the platform in November 2018, representatives from more than 50 businesses, 14 think tanks, and 6 multilateral organisations participated in the first round of debates. Over the course of five months, stakeholders from around the world shared lively exchanges and frank discussion on the future of our global rules-based trade system.

During this same period, businesses around the world experienced unforeseen challenges, such as tariff hikes, new regulations and political uncertainty. In addition, new forms of digital technology have continued to impact the way that business envisions global exchanges and trade.

Unlike an in-person gathering, the Global Dialogue on Trade digitally enabled platform captures the thoughts and opinions of participating stakeholders in real time. The fluidity of each debate topic helps to shape contributions from participating stakeholders on the platform. As dialogues unfold, participants are able to engage with one another through the provision of concrete and tangible examples. Contributions from the platform are formulated into a series of recommendations for reform. Recommendations, posted on the Global Dialogue on Trade portal, will channel into on-going intergovernmental processes.

The first set of debates, which concluded in March 2019, led to the following 10 recommendations for the creation of a trusted model of open trade and free enterprise that will work for everyone, every day, and everywhere.

The recommendations aim to provide guidance to stakeholders, as they consider the future of the rules-based multilateral trading system.

PLURILATERAL APPROACH

- Pursuing more flexible and pragmatic approaches to negotiations, instead of large multilateral single undertakings, is key in making progress on new rules at the WTO.
- Plurilateral approaches on specific issues could therefore be a useful tool.
- Plurilateral discussions such as the Joint Statement Initiatives processes, open to all, is one way of developing new rules.

E-COMMERCE

- Moratorium on electronic transmissions is important for businesses and consumers and should be maintained.
- Basic standards for digital trade in areas such as consumer protection and e-contracts should be implemented to facilitate and develop e-commerce.
- Good regulatory practices, including cross-border data flows, should be part of an e-commerce agenda.
- Close coordination between policy makers and businesses is crucial to develop global rules on e-commerce that can support all stakeholders.
- Digital technological developments can particularly benefit SMEs by allowing them to access international markets beyond their domestic markets. Policy makers should seek to maximize this positive effect.

DISTORTING TRADE PRACTICES

- Trade practices that lead to market distortions (e.g. overcapacity) can be better addressed within a multilateral framework than on a bilateral basis.
- Timely notifications on market-distorting trade practices are important to ensure transparency among Members.