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## DG Speech before the TNC

12 May 2014

Thank you Mr Chairman.

Since the General Council meeting in March, the TNC held its 34th formal meeting on 7 April.

At that meeting, we had the opportunity to hear directly from all of the Negotiating Chairs about the consultations that they had been conducting and their plans for work in the weeks ahead.

All Members had the opportunity to express their views and concerns on the way forward. I think we had a very useful exchange of views.

My statement has been made available to delegations in document JOB/TNC/38. And the full record of the meeting is available in document TN/C/M/34.

You will recall from that meeting that I suggested we take our work into a new phase, focused on resolving the problems that we have been outlining, testing what went wrong and putting forward potential solutions.

I therefore asked the Chairs to further broaden their contacts with you and conduct increasingly focused conversations.

I also asked you to be prepared, to talk to each other, to be creative, share ideas and — most of all — be open and honest with each other.

So today I will give a brief update on developments in this new phase since the TNC meeting in April.

Since that meeting I have continued my consultations. I have been listening to members and talking to the Chairs of Negotiating Groups.

Over the last month I have visited a number of countries, including Kenya and Uganda in their crucial roles as coordinators of the ACP and LDC groups, respectively.

I attended a meeting of the OECD in Paris last week, where I also took part in an informal ministerial gathering convened by the Australian government.

And in all of these forums I have been pleased with the response of members.

The messages I hear continue to be positive.

Members remain focused on our two priorities of: implementing the Bali package; and meeting our December deadline for preparing a Work Programme to conclude the DDA.

On the first point, I have been pleased to hear the reports of progress coming from the Trade Facilitation preparatory committee — including the recent completion of the legal review. And Ambassador Conejos will be reporting on this under Item 2 of the agenda.

Now we can focus more fully on the draft Protocol and of course the ongoing need to help developing countries meet their implementation objectives. On this I have been reinforcing the need for donors and international agencies, including the World Bank and UNCTAD, to give priority to this important work.

And of course we must also remain focused on the timely and full implementation of the other nine Decisions of the Bali Package on Agriculture, Development and LDC Issues. I trust that the members that are more directly concerned will be pursuing those issues in the relevant subsidiary bodies or even here in the General Council.

On the Work Programme, I welcome the positive commitment I have been hearing to further progress.

And I think members remain committed to the parameters that have helped frame discussions so far, particularly:

keeping development at the heart of our efforts.

focusing on what is doable.

And being open-minded.

In addition, I think there is broad recognition that the core issues of Agriculture, NAMA and Services need to be addressed promptly and that they need to be tackled in an integrated manner.

We all know that the Round is broader than these three areas alone, but I believe we will have to make progress here, and quickly, if there is to be any chance of advancing elsewhere.

In Agriculture, the Chair of the Special Session has been continuing his consultations with a range of members, including group coordinators. These consultations have shown a general willingness to work constructively.

A start has been made on identifying key concerns, but there is a pressing need to intensify and deepen engagement among delegations and move to consideration of possible approaches to deal with contested areas.

While respecting different views on the status of existing drafts, the Chair has urged delegations to proceed without prejudice, so that we can at least explore different perspectives on these issues to see where that leads us.

I endorse this call. Otherwise progress will be extremely difficult.

On NAMA, the Chair has held a number of meetings with members and group coordinators since the last TNC, and intends to pursue these consultations.

The objective of the consultations was to delve more deeply into the question he had raised which was “how and under what circumstances could each Member contribute to a meaningful NAMA result taking into consideration past experience, present realities and possible instruments at hand.”

On Services, the Chair of the Special Session has continued his consultations among delegations.

Overall, the signals received from members remain the same:

willingness to engage,  
ambition commensurate with other market access pillars,  
balance within the various services topics,  
and the importance of the development dimension.

In the Chair’s view, there is a pressing need to accelerate the process of moving from principles to specific elements of the Work Programme. He will continue his efforts in that direction.

I’ll also just say a quick word on Rules, as at the time of the TNC in April this was the one area which had not held an open-ended meeting.

While capital-based officials were in Geneva during Rules week in late April the Chairman took the opportunity to hold a second round of consultations with members and groups of members regarding the way forward.

An informal open-ended meeting will take place this Friday, where the Chair will report on those consultations and allow delegations an opportunity to share their views, should they wish to do so.

In the other areas, the Chairs are either in the process of consulting or remain at the disposal of delegations to pursue further and more focused consultations.

Moving on — a regular feature of my conversations, and those of the Chairs, has been how to build on the work done so far, particularly as it is captured in the 2008 texts.

While we could not agree on those texts in the past, and while it is clear that we cannot agree on them now, I believe members do agree that they provide important guidance on how to move forward.

However, it is still unclear in my view how far these texts can help us in building the bridges we need to close some critical gaps in terms of level of ambition and negotiating architecture in areas where convergence has continuously eluded us.

On the positive side, let me say two things.

First, we could not expect to be much further than where we are now. These uncertainties are natural and we will see the path ahead more clearly as we deepen our dialogue and get into a more focused and detailed conversation about substance.

Second, we have learned a lot with the past stalemates. We have to use that experience. I have personally been involved in these negotiations since 2001, so if there is anybody who doesn't want to see all that work go to waste, it's me.

Another point I'd like to stress is that this is, and will remain, a bottom-up process. This is your process.

You are talking among yourselves, to the Chairs, to me, and many ideas are being floated. But they are what they are: just ideas.

I can assure you there are no pre-cooked outcomes or approaches being prepared.

We should be completely open-minded to any approach that shows promise. I hope that this will be the case in this second phase of our conversations — and I will be there to facilitate your dialogue whenever necessary.

Finally, I think we should accept that this is not the round to end all rounds. It's not an isolated, self-contained or definitive task — rather it is part of a process.

It's just a step in the continuous process of trade liberalization.

Let's take a step that is commensurate with the size of our legs.

Bali was successful because we were realistic. We should be in a position to make some progress in most — or all — areas of the DDA negotiations. Let's put everything on the table and see how far we can go in each area of the negotiations.

But what's essential is that we keep making progress — even if it's not perfect. Let's focus on what's doable.

We can't stop here. We have to take this opportunity and use the momentum that Bali has given us.

Nothing I've seen or heard so far suggests that we can't do it. But we will need to redouble our efforts. We need to engage in a deeper way, and we need to do it now.

Be prepared to have some tough conversations.

I will be here to push you — and ask some difficult questions, such as: in 2008 you said you were prepared to do this — is this still the case today? You said you needed that — is this still the case? What are you prepared to put on the table to enable this trade-off?

Or, if you want a high level of ambition in agriculture, are you ready to give ground in NAMA and services? And vice-versa — if you are willing to have a high level of ambition in NAMA and services, are you ready to give ground in agriculture? You have to answer those questions.

In a month or two, after having these discussions, that's when we will know whether we are back in 2008, or whether this is something which shows promise and can happen.

My intention is that by the summer break we will have had some very serious conversations along these lines.

I will be travelling to important meetings outside Geneva over the next 10 days, including APEC in China and a meeting of multilateral agencies in Berlin.

But when I get back we will all need to be prepared for a busy June and July.

I will be in Geneva for most of that period, so you will be seeing me constantly and I will be inviting you — individually or in groups — for some difficult and frank conversations.

So get ready — it's time to start putting our Work Programme together.

I will convene a meeting of the TNC when I return to Geneva. Today is more of a briefing from me — we will be able to have a deeper conversation at that time.

Thank you Mr Chairman.