

Organised by CUTS International, Jaipur
Seminar on
Significance of Indian Proposals on Strengthening the WTO

And Book Release
Reforming the World Trade Organisation: Developing Countries in the Doha Round

November 21, 2009, New Delhi

Backgrounder

Objective

Seminar on the latest proposals circulated by India on ‘Strengthening the WTO’ for absorbing and recapitulating the opinions of a select group of experts on the subject so as to use the same as an input for Indian Negotiators, and public release of the book titled ‘Reforming the World Trade Organisation: Developing Countries in the Doha Round’, jointly published by CUTS International and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

Background

The debate on need, relevance and mode of reforming the WTO system in order to make it more inclusive of the voice of the developing world has been a longstanding one. Continuing uncertainties of the protracted Doha development Round of negotiations and inability of member nations to reach consensus on frontal issues in multilateral trade liberalisation has fuelled this debate in recent times. Subsequently, calls for WTO reforms have been renewed in the run-up to the seventh Ministerial Conference scheduled for 30 November – 2 December 2009.

As a civil society organisation working on trade and development, CUTS International has been constructively engaged in this debate in various capacities. A thorough and insightful book on WTO reforms by Faizel Ismail, Head of South African delegation to the WTO, and being published by CUTS and FES, is one of the outcomes of this engagement. This book, written from the perspective of participation of developing countries in multilateral trading system before the inception of WTO and since then, covers some of the most important issues at the heart of WTO reform debate.

Likewise, in a timely and judicious move, India has put forward five proposals towards strengthening the WTO in its official communication dated 2 July 2009. These proposals viz., (A) Trade Information System, (B) Revitalise WTO Committees, (C) WTO's Engagement with RTAs, (D) Legal Instrument for Preferential Market Access to LDCs and (E) Primacy of International Standards and Standard Setting for WTO Obligations, deserve careful attention as far as the WTO reform agenda is concerned. As the communication states at the outset, the delegation of India aims to initiate a discussion and build on these proposals for contributing towards meaningful reform process.

Asserting the importance of India’s communication, it has received endorsement from 17 WTO members including the European Communities. This endorsement¹ dated 16 October 2009, requests the General Council of the WTO *to establish an appropriate deliberative process to*

¹ WTO Document - WT/MIN(09)/W/1

review the organization's (WTO's) functioning, efficiency and transparency and consider possible improvements. The Chair of the General Council, in a subsequent statement² dated 21 October 2009, has acknowledged the inclusion of 'Strengthening the WTO' as one of the prime agendas for the upcoming seventh Ministerial Conference. In addition, official Communiqué of the Informal African Trade Ministerial Meeting concluded in Cairo on 28 October 2009 also specifically refers to the importance of India's communication and unconditionally lends their support for the same. But, in order to push the reform agenda forward and take it to a successful conclusion, the proposals in the communication need reconsideration and refinement.

Against this backdrop, CUTS is organising an event in New Delhi with the twin objectives of facilitating a seminar on the proposals made by India as well as bringing the aforementioned book to the public domain. The ideas emerging out of the seminar and the contents of the book may provide inputs to the Indian delegation and fortify India's proactive role in reforming the multilateral trade regime for the better.

Venue

Lecture Hall - Annex
India International Centre
40, Max Mueller Marg, New Delhi

Time

10.00 AM to 2.00 PM

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² WTO Document – JOB(09)/144