

Is the WTO Still at Crossroads?

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A Fireside Chat with Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala moderated by Pradeep S Mehta

- 1) Last month you completed 2 years at the helm of the WTO. What has been the most daunting challenge you have faced during this period, and which has been the most rewarding experience?
- 2) There seems to be widespread agreement that the WTO needs institutional reform, the rulebook needs update and the two-tier dispute settlement system needs to be revived. Yet, the divides between different positions are often based on systemic concerns and seem too far to bridge. What do you think is the way forward?
- 3) You have vast experience of seeing different types of decision-making structures in different international organisations. How do you think the WTO's decision-making processes can remain member-driven, consensus-based and yet be made more outcome-oriented?
- 4) Despite many efforts, there is still a perception that development concerns remain underrepresented at the WTO. How can we fully mainstream development concerns at the WTO, beyond traditional tools such as special and differential treatment?
- 5) Today we see a growing interest in “coalitions of the willing” in the form of plurilaterals and Joint Statement Initiatives within the WTO itself. Do these reduce the centrality of the WTO as the forum for *multilateral* trade negotiations, or do they signal flexibility and a reimagining of the WTO's role?
- 6) There is less than a year to go for MC13 in Abu Dhabi. The limited Geneva Package of MC12 was welcomed as a breakthrough last June, but does it now put even greater pressure on Members to deliver more concrete outcomes by MC13? Which are the areas where you are most hopeful of seeing outcomes?
- 7) Civil society organisations and NGOs have been powerful voices both for and against the work of the WTO. In this context, what should be the role of NGOs which recognise the immense value of a rules-based multilateral trading system with a well-functioning WTO at its centre? How do you think NGOs like CUTS can help create a better buy-in for trade multilateralism and the WTO?

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