

## **Informal Consultations of the Negotiating Group on Trade Facilitation**

**20 January 2010**

### **I. Introduction**

The chairman of the Negotiating Group on Trade Facilitation convened an informal meeting to consult on the next steps in the negotiations on trade facilitation in preparation for the February and March cluster meetings.

In his opening remarks he brought to members attention the consolidated draft text contained in document W/165 and comments/submissions made by Members in document W/167. He also pointed out the conclusions made by the Ministers during the seventh Ministerial Conference held in December 2009 to conclude the Round in 2010 and to undertake a stock-taking exercise by end of March 2010. He noted that in achieving these, the Ministers highlighted the following:

- The need to intensify bilateral, trilaterals or quadrilaterals in the early parts of 2010 and feed into the multilateral process;
- The need for negotiating chairs to schedule activities starting from the end of January running through to March in order to provide a high degree of transparency
- The need to convene meetings of Senior Officials during the weeks of 15 February and 22 March 2010.
- The need to hold a stock taking exercise in the last week of March to assess the possibility of completing the round by end of 2010.

He also made the following suggestions as part of the next steps:

- To have a read-through of the whole document from Article 1 to Article 16 using a broad brush approach to ensure that members views are accurately reflected
- To begin by the February cluster eliminating some of the brackets and merging texts where there is more than one version
- To schedule a session on special and differential treatment on a Thursday during the

February cluster.

He further pointed out his intention to continue ;

- updating the text in light of members submissions
- using the bottom up approach, and a fully inclusive process of consultation

He further pointed out the need to hear from members on their thoughts beyond March 2010, whether to schedule meetings in May and July 2010.

## II. Deliberations

The following were the main issues highlighted in members interventions:

- Support for chair's suggestions
- To have focused discussions beyond march
- Additional work was still required to be undertaken on S&D treatment provisions
- To use March cluster to focus on technical areas under GATT Articles V, VIII and X.
- To focus on practices and principles rather than being legalistic
- Define workplan for period after March after undertaking an assessment of the February and March cluster outcomes
- Decide how to move forward on proposals where there is no consensus among members.
- Start identifying specific articles of focus by the February meetings
- Hold inter-sessional consultative meetings before and after the February cluster
- Chair to continue presiding over discussions on S&DT
- Achieve balance by discussing each proposal individually
- Task Secretariat to identify areas where there is no text or one proposal under S&DT
- Use march cluster to review proposals that are in competition
- Undertake a second detailed reading in March
- Outline issues for March well in advance in order to allow the invitation of appropriate officials from capital
- Start discussions with easier topics such as publication under Article X or areas that have enjoyed high degree of convergence
- Look at drafting issues without losing sight of practical approaches
- Provide additional time to discuss S&DT during the March cluster
- Process should continue to be member driven
- Hold specific meeting with Annex D organizations during the February meeting, back to back with discussions on S&DT
- Schedule more than one meeting beyond March and make adjustments as the year unfolds
- There is need to have the reasoning behind proposals tabled by the proponents in order to allow each member understand the proposal and not focus on a mechanical exercise of removing brackets.
- Have discussions on some proposals led by the proponents.
- The Secretariat should be tasked to classify all technical issues and provide the same to Members.
- The text may not be easy to read line by line
- There is need to establish the status to be given to each provision (i.e. mandatory or

voluntary)

### III. Conclusion

The Chairman pointed out the following in his concluding remarks:

- Undertake a first reading of the consolidated text, starting with Article 1
- Allow time for bilaterals and small group meetings
  
- Delegations wishing to hold meetings should contact the Secretariat to avoid overlap and to allow for participation
  
- Have a clean up before the February Cluster
  
- Depending on how February progresses, see how to use March
- will send out fax
  
- Members should come prepared.