OVERVIEW OF DEVELOPMENTS IN THE   
INTERNATIONAL TRADING ENVIRONMENT

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

9 December 2021

Chairperson: H.E. Dr Athaliah Lesiba Molokomme (Botswana)

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS BY THE CHAIRPERSON

1. Good afternoon and welcome to this meeting of the TPRB, which was convened by Airgram WTO/AIR/TPR/120 on 22 November 2021.

2. The purpose of this meeting is for Members and Observers of the Trade Policy Review Body to undertake their annual overview of developments in the international trading environment which are having an impact on the multilateral trading system, as provided in Paragraph G of Annex 3 of the Marrakesh Agreement.

3. As mentioned in the Airgram, today's discussion is assisted by the Director‑General's Annual Report which provides a comprehensive overview of the overall state of global trade, of significant developments in the implementation of trade policies by WTO Members and Observers, and an up‑date on several trade policy issues affecting the trading system for the period between mid‑October 2020 and mid-October 2021.

4. This Report has also been produced in the context of the COVID‑19 pandemic, and the recent emergence of a new variant, causing the postponement of the MC12 were stark reminders that we live in precarious and uncertain times. Against this backdrop, the ramifications of the pandemic - on trade as well as more broadly on the global economy, are covered extensively in the Report.

5. The Report was circulated in document WT/TPR/OV/24 on 22 November 2021.

6. Let me briefly recall the purpose of the Trade Policy Review Mechanism, which according to Annex 3 of the Marrakesh Agreement, is to achieve greater transparency in, and understanding of, Members' trade and trade-related policies and measures. The TPRM is not intended to serve as a basis for the enforcement of obligations under WTO Agreements, for dispute-settlement purposes or to impose new policy commitments on Members.

7. These same fundamental principles apply to the periodic reports by the Director‑General - such as the Annual Report presented today. The trade monitoring exercise is, above all, a transparency exercise. It is intended to be purely factual and has no legal effect on the rights and obligations of WTO Members.

8. As you know, the preparation of these reports relies on Members' timely and specific inputs to the trade monitoring exercise as well as on their notifications under the various WTO Agreements. For the current Report, 60% of the Membership provided input, representing around 94% of world trade.

9. I do not wish to go into detail about the substantive findings of the Director-General's Report. It speaks for itself, and I will shortly invite Director-General Dr Ngozi Okonjo‑Iweala to present the Report and share her views. Before I do so, allow me to make a few observations.

10. The Report found that there has been encouraging news for a post-pandemic recovery over the period covered, although the outlook for the global economy remains uncertain. As we know, the recovery is uneven across regions. Nevertheless, the multilateral trading system has shown resilience and played an instrumental role in encouraging restraint in the implementation of trade‑restrictive measures.

11. I believe that the findings of the Report, while positive in terms of the world trade and economic growth, also reminds us of the fundamental challenges towards ensuring a sustainable recovery, including equitable access to COVID‑19 vaccines, diagnostics, and therapeutics. Although immediately after the outbreak of the pandemic Members implemented many measures which restricted the flow of trade, today we see a different and more positive picture.

12. For example, of the 399 COVID‑19 trade related measures recorded since the outbreak of the pandemic, 66% were of a facilitating nature and 34% were restrictive. Generally, Members have shown commitment to providing transparency on these measures and, importantly, to rolling them back when no longer needed.

13. The Report shows that, as at mid-October 2021, 205 COVID-19 related trade‑facilitating measures with an estimated trade coverage of USD 112 billion were still in force compared to 56 restrictive measures, with an estimated trade coverage of USD 92 billion. Therefore, it is important to note that the trade coverage of the COVID‑19 facilitating measures still in place is significantly larger than that of restrictive ones.

14. At the same time, the monitoring of non-COVID-19 trade measures reveals that fewer restrictions were put in place during this period. However, the stockpile of previous trade restrictions which are still in place remains large.

15. Overall, I believe the Report provides us with a very important and useful snapshot of the latest developments in the implementation of trade policies – specifically in relation to the pandemic, but also more broadly. Providing this kind of transparency is what the trade monitoring mechanism is about and hopefully that is helpful to the Membership.

16. Now, let me give the floor to the DG to introduce this Report. Subsequently, I will open the floor for comments from delegations.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL

17. I am pleased to join you today to take stock of recent trade policy developments.

18. You all will have seen my Report which was circulated to Members on 22 November, in document WT/TPR/OV/24.

19. I won't go through the main findings of the Report in great detail. Ambassador Molokomme has already alluded to many of them, and you have no doubt looked at the report yourselves.

20. There are a few figures I want to highlight. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, WTO Members and Observers have implemented 399 COVID‑19 trade and trade‑related measures on goods. Of these, 262 (66%) were of a trade facilitating nature and 137 (34%) could be considered trade restrictive. In other words, trade-facilitating measures outnumbered trade-restrictive ones by nearly two to one. This is positive.

21. Of the restrictive measures recorded, 85% of them – that is, 117 measures, have been export restrictions. Although almost 60% of these had been repealed as of mid-October 2021, 45 export restrictions are still in place targeting products such as medicines, other medical supplies, and personal protective equipment. I urge Members to roll back these restrictions as soon as possible as they may be hampering the COVID‑19 response, including vaccine production and deployment. I may also add that there are still some import restrictive measures related to the pandemic.

22. Some of the trade-facilitating measures - around 22% of them – have also been unwound.

23. All told, the value of traded goods covered by the 205 COVID‑19 trade-facilitating measures still in place as of mid-October 2021 was estimated at USD 112.1 billion while the trade coverage of the 56 trade-restrictive measures stood at USD 92.3 billion.

24. While the report focuses primarily on goods trade, it also finds that 138 of the 153 reported pandemic‑related measures affecting services trade remain in force. Most of these appear to be trade‑facilitating with an eye to minimising supply chain disruptions, such as quicker entry processes for transport personnel and business travellers. Despite such efforts, services trade has been slower to recover than goods trade, in part due to weak demand and continued limitations on travel and tourism.

25. When it comes to the monitoring of trade measures not directly related to the COVID‑19 pandemic, the Report reveals that Members and Observers put fewer restrictions in place between October 2020 and October 2021 compared to previous review periods. Nevertheless, the stockpile of trade restrictions introduced but unrepealed since 2009 has continued to grow, and now covers traded merchandise worth an estimated USD 1.5 trillion, or close to 9% of world imports as at mid‑October 2021. This steady accumulation of trade restrictions should be of concern to all of us.

The Report

26. First, the Report shows that trade has been central to combatting the pandemic, and that the multilateral trading system has played an instrumental role in encouraging restraint in the use of trade restrictions in response to the shocks arising from COVID‑19.

27. As we know, the outlook for the global economy remains uncertain. The postponement of MC12 as a result of the new Omicron variant was certainly a stark and disappointing reminder of that.

28. The monitoring report makes clear that the multilateral trading system has been, and continues to be, an important factor in our response to the pandemic. It makes clear how WTO Committees have continued operating throughout the health crisis to service Members. But we also know that trade and the WTO can and must do more to foster production of, and equitable access to, sufficient quantities of COVID‑19 vaccines, diagnostics and therapeutics. This is why I have urged Members to reach an agreement on pandemic response, including intellectual property issues, by the end of February. As Dr Tedros said the other day "We may be done with COVID, but COVID is not done with us". Future pandemics are almost certain to emerge as well – and we owe it to the people we serve, and to future generations, to ensure the WTO makes its full contribution to preparedness and response and the national and global levels.

29. Second, this trade monitoring exercise has since day one been about transparency and predictability – about collaborating with you, the Members, to reduce uncertainty and bolster confidence in how markets are operating. This is one of the WTO's core functions to support our Members, and it also matters for businesses and consumers. When the pandemic hit in early 2020, we all had to adjust and adapt, and for the WTO Secretariat, part of this meant using the trade monitoring exercise, with its familiar verification mechanism, to report on the developments with regard to trade measures taken in response to the crisis.

30. Third, while it is true that this multilateral and cross-cutting transparency exercise is only as strong as Members want it to be, I believe credit is due to delegations for your collaboration with this exercise. But like Oliver Twist, I always ask for more – so I will say that with your support we can do better, and echo Ambassador Molokomme on the importance of getting more Members involved in trade monitoring.

31. Since this exercise started in 2009, it has become an important factual transparency tool for Members. As you are aware, the contents of this Report have no legal effect on the rights and obligations of WTO Members. The Report does not question the explicit right of Members to adopt certain trade measures.

32. I will stop here. I look forward to hearing delegations exchange views on the findings of the Report.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

SWITZERLAND

33. First, we would like to thank Director‑General Okonjo-Iweala for her introductory remarks, and the Secretariat for having produced this new Report on trade-related developments.

34. This outstanding monitoring report offers once again a comprehensive picture of the situation, problems and challenges we are currently facing in the area of international trade almost two years since the outbreak of the pandemic.

35. The situation remains dramatic worldwide and continues to affect us all, in particular the most vulnerable. The emergence of new variants keeps on versing shadow on our uncertain environment. The monitoring report offers once again encouraging perspectives as GDP and world trade growth in 2021 may exceed early estimates.

36. According to the Report, the volume of world merchandise trade is now expected to increase by 10.8% in 2021, revised up from 8.0% in the previous report. Trade growth should then slow to 4.7% in 2022, revised up from 4.0%.

37. As in previous reports, we welcome the section on COVID-19 trade and trade‑related measures, as well as the section on general economic support measures.

38. We are somehow relieved to note that Members have exercised restraints in imposing trade‑restrictive measures on COVID‑19 related goods and services over the review period. 205 COVID-19-related trade-facilitating measures with an estimated trade coverage of USD 112 billion are still in force compared to 56 trade-restrictive measures with an estimated trade coverage of USD 92 billion.

39. Witnessing four times more trade-facilitating measures than trade restrictive-measures is indeed encouraging. We should however acknowledge that the negative impact of export restrictions or export bans significantly outweighs the benefits of facilitating trade. In fact, it is inefficient to facilitate trade in a certain type of goods if they, hypothetically under export restrictions, do not reach the borders where trade-facilitating measures are in force.

40. The Report suggests that the multilateral trading system has played an instrumental role in encouraging restraint in the implementation of trade-restrictive measures. At the same time, WTO Members have not found a way, yet, to coordinate on an effective response to the pandemic, in particular on export restrictions, transparency and trade facilitation. This is where we could do better. Switzerland will continue to support a holistic approach in the WTO response to the pandemic. Likewise, we remain committed to work out a multilateral solution in the underlying discussions.

41. The WTO has a central role to play in ensuring that supply chains are kept open and restrictive trade policies are avoided. Maintaining and enhancing transparency is key in contributing to this objective. In that regard, I wish to recall the importance of the continuation and strengthening of this monitoring exercise.

42. Empowering the Secretariat in its monitoring role could benefit the whole Membership. Let me emphasize that transparency is a source of confidence and a matter for businesses, consumers and policy makers. Therefore, we should not refrain from confirming the Secretariat's requests for verification whenever the underlying measures are sourced in official or reliable websites.

43. Increasing transparency does not only mean to improve participation to and the quality of the monitoring reports. It is also a matter of respecting our notification obligations. In this respect, let me refer to the proposal discussed in the CTG and the General Council to improve compliance with notification obligations and of which Switzerland is a co-sponsor.

REPUBLIC OF KOREA

44. My delegation appreciates the Director‑General's efforts to present the WTO Trade Monitoring Report, which has contributed to enhancing our understanding on developments in the international trading environment from mid-October 2020 to mid-October 2021.

45. This Report covers a wide range of trade-related policies, including those in response to the pandemic. In this difficult time of COVID-19, it not only provides an overall picture of trade-related policies and the world trade environment but also helps to reduce the uncertainty caused by the pandemic.

46. From this Report, we could hear some good news that economic recovery has been boosted by governmental support and improvements in the production and dissemination of COVID‑19 vaccines. However, the recent, fast‑spreading variant Omicron can cause uncertainty again to the growth of international trade and GDP. To enable the positive trend to continue, we all need to renew our commitment to free trade by exercising restraint in adopting new trade-restrictive measures and lifting such measures to the extent possible.

47. My delegation supports the Secretariat's continued efforts of publishing its Trade Monitoring Report, which will provide an updated picture with more information about trade-related measures and the trade environment in the coming months.

UNITED KINGDOM

48. The United Kingdom appreciates the work of the Director‑General and the Secretariat in preparing this Annual Report on developments in the trading system.

49. We would also like to acknowledge the efforts of the Director‑General, the Secretariat and the Membership in maintaining WTO business in the period under review. Although it was not possible to hold the Twelfth Ministerial Conference as planned last week, the Secretariat and Members did a commendable job in Committee work and in ongoing negotiations. Work on most disputes was able to follow the schedules developed by the panels and arbitrators in consultation with the disputing parties.

50. Similarly, Trade Policy Reviews for 15 Members went ahead between October 2020 and December 2021. This was accomplished despite the challenges of the pandemic, including disruptions to both travel and usual working patterns, which complicated the process and prevented many delegations from attending their TPRs in person. This effort was important to maintaining the schedule of reviews to the extent possible and reflects the value of the TPRs to the WTO system.

51. Noting the Report, the fact that both GDP and world trade growth and continued to exceed expectations in the first half of the year, which resulted in upgraded WTO forecasts for 2021 and 2022, is a very positive development. Other positive news includes the slowed pace of trade‑restricting measures implemented because of the pandemic, and the removal of a number of COVID-related trade restricting measures, while a large share of the trade-facilitating measures remain in effect.

52. The report notes the importance of trade in responding to and recovering from the pandemic. The multilateral trading system will remain essential to the global economic recovery. The emergence of the Omicron variant reminds us that we cannot take for granted the continued recovery of world trade and the global economy. We note in particular the risk to recovery in trade in services. WTO Members must remain committed to ensuring that any trade restrictive measures are targeted, proportionate, transparent, and temporary in order to prevent disruptions to global supply chains and to minimise inflationary effects.

53. Members have also responded to the pandemic by providing an unprecedented number of support measures – measures that have been greater than those observed in the wake of the Global Financial Crisis. While the flow of new measures has slowed, many of the measures involve packages implemented over several years. It is important to track the types of measures being put in place, including the sectors of the economy that are targeted by these support programmes.

54. We remain concerned that the stock of trade restricting measures implemented since 2009 and not related to the pandemic now covers close to 9% of world imports, or about USD 1.5 trillion worth of trade.

55. In conclusion, the United Kingdom considers that the report continues to make a useful contribution to transparency, particularly by indicating areas where Members need to be alert regarding disruptions to trade and to the multilateral trading system.

JAPAN

56. To begin with, Japan would like to express its appreciation to the Director‑General and the Secretariat for developing this Annual Monitoring Report

57. Japan recognizes that the TPR and the monitoring reports are the core of the monitoring function for the implementation of trade agreements. We appreciate that the Report has been circulated in a timely manner, particularly under the current COVID‑19 pandemic which has underscored the importance of enhancing transparency in global trade.

58. As explained by the Chair and the Director‑General in their remarks earlier, according to the Report, international trade and GDP have recorded higher than expected growth with a volume of trade in goods increasing by 10% and GDP increasing by 5% in 2021.

59. Since the outbreak of COVID‑19, during all the reporting period, trade‑facilitating measures significantly outweighed trade‑restrictive measures. In total there were 262 cases of the former and 137 cases of the latter.

60. Japan values the fact that it shows to the international community the efforts of the Member countries to create a predictable and stable trading environment and that the WTO can play a meaningful role in addressing the COVID‑19 pandemic.

61. MC12 has been postponed but, looking ahead to post‑pandemic time, Japan would like to cooperate with other Members to support the economic recovery from the perspective of trade with the aim of ensuring the recovery is beneficial for all Members.

UNITED STATES

62. The Report notes that whatever the trade growth figure is for 2021 we remain in a period of remarkable uncertainty, trying to confront rolling and multifaceted challenges that were unforeseen not long ago. Against this backdrop of uncertainty, we believe the rules‑based multilateral trading system has made an important contribution to global economic stability. We shouldn't continue to overlook these positives; it is important for building confidence.

63. The Report, again, provides important information on Members' trade measures during the pandemic. The data continues to demonstrate that Members, by and large, are acting responsibly during a period of unprecedented challenge and even emergency. This two should give us encouragement.

64. Members put in place relatively few COVID‑19 trade and trade‑related measures during the past year. Of the nearly 400 such measures since the beginning of the pandemic, trade‑facilitating measures have outpaced trade‑restrictive measures by two to one. Of the trade‑facilitating measures only 22% had been repealed by October. However, more than 60% of the export‑restrictive measures had been eliminated. It is clear that Members are eliminating restrictive measures as they deem conditions warrant and retaining trade‑facilitating measures. This too is encouraging.

65. The story for non‑COVID‑19 trade and trade‑related measures also provides some welcome news. Trade‑facilitating measures outpaced trade‑restrictive measures and the comparison of trade coverage isn't even close. The trade coverage of facilitative measures swamps that of restrictive‑measures by nearly five to one. Of course, none of this means that we cannot or should not try to learn trade lessons from the pandemic. We strongly support starting these discussions in the WTO; and in fact, that is why we support and action plan on pandemic resilience and preparedness.

66. Members should have the opportunity in WTO Committees to reflect on and discuss what has happened during the crisis and work together to identify lessons learned. The facts reflected in the Report support our view that it is premature to consider new obligations, that Members are responding responsibly, and we should be thoughtful in our approach based on facts and a better understanding of the important policy objectives being achieved.

67. We are confident that such an investment of Members' energy and focus will make important contributions as we continue to move forward.

68. I would like to make a few observations specific to the Report.

69. Regarding the SPS section, the United States appreciates the level of detail provided in Table 3.13 – New STCs Raised in the TBT Committee Meetings of October 2020, February 2021, and June 2021. We would like to suggest that a similar table be added to the SPS section of the document; such an addition will help to highlight new specific trade concerns and promote consistency between the sections.

70. We have a few comments regarding Section 6 ‑ Transparency of Trade Policies. The Report notes in paragraph 6.2 that a lack of capacity is a major reason for non‑compliance with notification obligations and that this is something to be addressed collectively by WTO Members. However, through our engagement with Members on the proposal to enhance transparency and improve compliance with notification requirements under WTO Agreements (GC/204/Rev.8 and CTG/14/Rev.8), we have observed that lack of capacity often means lack of manpower to prepare notifications rather than a technical inability to complete notifications. If this is correct, it is not clear how this could be addressed collectively.

71. The Report also allows us to make several horizontal observations. For example, compliance with notification obligations is significantly better in some Committees than in others and it would be interesting to hear if other Members have perspectives on why this is so.

72. Once again, the Report shows that across a number of WTO Committees there is an observable trend that Members are not submitting required notifications. For example, in the Committee on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures the share of Members not making any notification registers a substantial increase from 25% to 68% in the period 1995‑2021. We have one suggestion for the Secretariat to improve this portion of the Report. The subsection on agriculture notifications provides extensive detail on the number of questions submitted by Members but has little information on Members' compliance with their notification obligations and we ask this to be provided in the next report.

73. Finally, we would like to call attention to the Secretariat's statement on page 7 that the Report is "first and foremost a transparency exercise. It is intended to be purely factual". And the Report is useful in providing salient facts. There are moments, however, when the Secretariat strays into advocacy, stating what Members must do. We ask that the Secretariat maintains its neutrality and objectivity – traits that sustain well-earned trust and confidence.

HONG KONG, CHINA

74. Hong Kong, China would like to thank the Director‑General and her team for the efforts in compiling the Annual Report.

75. As the world continues to battle the COVID‑19 pandemic, the outlook for the global economy remains uncertain.

76. The information and analysis in the Report, in particular trade and trade‑related measures relating to the COVID‑19 pandemic, are particularly useful when Members reflect on the latest trends in international trade and prepare for economic recovery. Although there are some encouraging signs as world trade and GDP growth exceeded expectations and prompted a more positive forecast, risk remain as less developed regions feel left behind.

77. Moreover, as commercial trade continues to be restricted by limits in international travel, WTO Members should bear in mind the need to ensure sustainable as well as inclusive growth for all.

78. We are pleased to note that WTO Members have demonstrated restrain in imposing new trade restrictive measures related to the pandemic. As at mid‑October 2021, 59% of the trade‑restrictive measures implemented since the outbreak have been repealed, whereas the number and trade coverage of the facilitating measures are higher than that of the trade‑restrictive measures.

79. As for non‑COVID‑19 related measures, we are pleased to note that fewer restrictions were put in place during the review period. For example, on goods trade, more new trade‑facilitating measures compared to trade‑restrictive ones have been recorded. The trade coverage of the import facilitating measures is much higher than that for the import restrictive measures and represents the second‑lowest value recorded since October 2012.

80. That said, we continue to be concerned about the large stockpile of trade restrictions implemented since 2009 and which are still in force. These were estimated at USD 1.5 trillion, representing some 8.7% of world imports as at mid‑October 2021.

81. With that, we call on Members to exercise caution and restraint when considering taking trade remedy actions and to roll back such measures when circumstances no longer warrant their continuation. Members should also consider taking appropriate trade‑facilitating and support measures instead, especially when the world is still battling the COVID‑19 pandemic.

82. As one of the Members actively responding to the DG's requests for information and for verification, we continue to encourage more Members to participate in this exercise to enhance the transparency and predictability of trade policy development worldwide.

83. The DG's Report notes that compliance with the notification requirements of WTO Agreements remains uneven. This will undermine individual agreements and the effective operation of the multilateral trading system. We urge all WTO Members to work constructively to improve the situation.

84. While 67 Members shared COVID‑19‑related economic support measures in response of the DG's request, we are however disappointed that only 33 Members volunteered information on regular general economic support measures. We reiterate our view that economic support measures form an integral part of the trade policy of an economy.

85. Recognizing that the WTO has an important role to play in ensuring transparency of trade measures, we appeal to Members to supports this transparency exercise. We look forward to having a separate annex on general economic support measures in future trade monitoring reports.

EUROPEAN UNION

86. The EU would like to express appreciation to the Director‑General and the WTO Secretariat for their efforts in preparing and releasing the Annual Report and in particular for the thorough analysis of the impact of the global health crisis on trade and trade policy in the world.

87. We would like to stress the importance of this trade monitoring exercise as it brings some additional transparency to current trade policies and practices, in particular during the pandemic. Transparency is vital in this exercise as well as in the overall context of making the WTO function effectively.

88. This Report reflects that the world continues to battle the COVID‑19 virus. The pandemic represents the greatest threat to the world economy and by extension to the international trade, particularly if more dangerous variants emerge over the next months.

89. MC12 had unfortunately to be postponed due to a worsening sanitary situation globally. However, we need to preserve what was achieved in negotiating texts, as well as maintain momentum on a range of subjects, which includes the WTO response to the pandemic.

90. The EU is the world's leading exporter of COVID-19 vaccines, having exported more than 1.45 billion of finished doses by end November, to 156 countries in the world. In total, one in each two vaccines produced in the EU has been made available for export, and one in each two vaccines placed on international markets (i.e. outside of domestic markets) originates from the EU.

91. Paradoxically we are also one of the two WTO Members to have notified an export measure on vaccines, in the form of our export authorisation mechanism, which allowed us to keep track of exports and to ensure compliance with our public health objectives. That measure has been in compliance with G20 commitments on COVID-19 trade measures in that it was targeted, proportionate, transparent and indeed temporary. As a demonstration of our commitment to this last aspect - the EU has now notified the end of our export authorisation measure for vaccines to take effect on 31 December 2021.

92. We welcome the work done by the WTO Secretariat in reporting on COVID-19 trade-related economic support measures. Transparency of support measures (even though not exhaustive) is especially important now, given that we have entered an economic recovery phase and the undoubted impact of such measures on trade.

93. We are ready to further discuss how the WTO should engage in the reporting of economic support measures.

94. Let me now say a few words on specific trade-related measures taken by WTO Members in reaction to the pandemic. The Report has highlighted the Secretariat's valiant efforts to provide Members with as comprehensive an overview as possible of national measures taken in reaction to the global health emergency. We would like to echo the comments by Switzerland, including on the important role that the WTO Secretariat could fulfil if empowered to do so.

95. The Director‑General has made this a personal priority since her arrival in March, and we would like to thank her and commend her for her efforts. It is now incumbent on Members to reflect how we can do better in future. We have to acknowledge that the WTO's current transparency arrangements have not provided for the necessary overview of trade-related measures that Members have taken to combat the pandemic within their own countries. As the Report states, 11 Members have still not notified measures that they have introduced in response to COVID‑19, and there are doubtless others of which the Secretariat is not aware. In our view, especially Members within whose territories there are significant producers of essential medical goods, in particular vaccines, should be prepared to provide additional transparency about potential domestic restrictions that would affect the supply of essential medical goods to trading partners that are dependent on them to treat their own populations. This can help map out the reliability of international supply chains and reduce frictions around questions of equitable supply of essential medical goods.

96. Some further openness by the private sector or by trade associations, in terms of providing basic transparency around plans to help diversify production or regarding the number of licensing agreements in place, may also be appropriate, of course within the limits of not divulging proprietary information.

97. The upcoming appraisal of the Trade Policy Review Mechanism in 2022 would be another good occasion for Members to engage further on monitoring and the pursuit of transparency.

98. We thank the WTO Secretariat for its ongoing contribution to the trade monitoring work in enhancing transparency. We call for the continuation and strengthening of this exercise.

CHINA

99. China appreciates the Secretariat's efforts on the comprehensive and updated monitoring Report, which plays a very important role in enhancing the transparency of trade and trade‑related measures, encouraging restraint in the implementation of trade‑restrictive measures and monitoring international trade‑related developments as the world is still battling the COVID‑19 pandemic and the global economy faces a period of recovery.

100. As noted in the Report, although there is some encouraging news for post‑pandemic economic recovery, which is mainly world trade and GDP growth continued to exceed expectations in the first‑half of the year, the outlook for the global economy remains uncertain.

101. Fundamental changes, such as equitable access to vaccines, diagnostics, and therapeutics, remain at the core of the downside risks that the world faces from the pandemic.

102. We note that since the outbreak of the pandemic around 400 trade and trade‑related measures in goods have been implemented by WTO Members and Observers. It is encouraging that two thirds of them were of trade‑facilitating nature and only one third could be considered trade‑restrictive.

103. We also note that export restrictions accounted for 85% of all restrictive measures recorded, of which 59% had been repealed by mid‑October 2021.

104. We call for Members' elimination of the remaining export restrictions in order to avoid further disruption of the global supply chain.

105. As the most serious pandemic in a century is still spreading, we have to make the WTO more responsive to the pandemic. It is all the more imperative that Members pull together to tide over this very difficult time.

106. As a Chinese proverb reads "the going may be tough when one walks alone, but it gets easier when people walk together".

107. China strongly supports the rules‑based multilateral trading system with the WTO at its core. Although MC12 has again been postponed the momentum here in the WTO shall never be lost. China stands ready to work with all Members to build an open world economy and it supports the fair distribution of unimpeded trade in vaccines and other key medical supplies across the world. We look forward to a greater role of the WTO in fighting against the pandemic and boosting world economic recovery.

COLOMBIA

108. We would first like to thank the Director‑General and the Secretariat for having prepared this report, and for the efforts made to gather information from Members and to quantify and systematize this information.

109. We note that the report contains very interesting and useful analytical data on global economic performance, and projections for the coming months, which will help our authorities navigate through these uncertain times. It is safe to say that the most recent COVID variant – Omicron – has created fresh uncertainty, while raising new questions about economic performance and economic recovery.

110. We also note the increasingly comprehensive information provided on trade in services and trends in these sectors. The information concerning the pandemic's impact on trade in services, tourism and the movement of persons, contains elements that are useful for our authorities.

111. Furthermore, this version of the report separates ordinary trade‑related measures from the extraordinary measures taken in response to the pandemic. This provides clarity, facilitates understanding and allows for comparison with earlier periods.

112. Looking at the document in greater detail, we note that a large number of the measures taken in response to the pandemic have been trade facilitation measures and that a considerable number of restrictive measures have been lifted. This shows that trade rules are effective in responding to the challenges of the current health crisis.

113. Nevertheless, when it comes to trade‑restricting measures, my delegation cannot hide its concern regarding the restrictions imposed on exports of vaccines and their components. These measures, which have different names and characteristics, have recently decreased to a certain extent, but continue to constitute significant barriers to ensuring timely access to vaccines for all Members. We stress that it is facilitation measures, and not restrictive measures, that will enable us to collectively and effectively address this global problem.

114. Furthermore, as we have pointed out at previous Trade Policy Review Body meetings, an increase in general economic support measures and emergency measures taken by governments was to be expected in the context of the pandemic. We welcome the information provided on support measures introduced by governments in response to the pandemic and measures of a cross‑cutting nature.

115. It is clear that these support measures have a considerable impact on global trade. Such measures can have highly significant distortive effects, particularly on small economies like that of Colombia. We encourage the continued inclusion in future reports of specific information and analysis concerning general support measures and measures taken to address the crisis brought about by COVID.

116. Lastly, I should mention that this report provides information that is relevant to all Members and shows, now more than ever before, the importance of the commitment to transparency within the Organization.

117. My delegation has been and will remain committed to this monitoring exercise and to transparency. We benefited from the technical support of Secretariat staff when submitting information for the various notifications and for the preparation of this report, and in this respect, emphasize the importance of enhancing cooperation within this Organization in order to respond to this collective challenge.

RUSSIAN FEDERATION

118. We thank the Director‑General and the Secretariat for preparing and circulating the Report. We also value the endurance of the Secretariat in obtaining the information from the delegations.

119. My delegation is always an active participant of the efforts in the Report. One of the issues mentioned in that Report is the COVID pandemic and the response of Members to it. The issue which we need to raise is the recognition of vaccines. Currently the Russian vaccines Sputnik‑V is accepted in 71 countries, and we believe that worldwide recognition of vaccines without any prejudice, especially medically‑effective ones, is a very important point and issue to overcome this bottleneck to world trade.

120. Apart from COVID, we monitor that trade coverage of trade‑restrictive measures is this year only USD 105.9 billion. It is much less than in the previous reports, and it means that the amount of non‑COVID trade‑restrictive measures diminishes comparing to previous reports. It is a positive sign.

121. The Russian Federation is a staunch supporter of the multilateral trading system and its ability to promote trade in a rules‑based manner. Also we value, as said above, the efforts by the Secretariat and by our friends, and I would say the friends of all delegations, Peter and Gloria, in providing this Report.

122. One issue which arose last time and which we raise today is that the Report starts from mid‑October and finishes in mid‑October. It contradicts the astronomical year, because probably it would be more convenient and we could think to promote reports for the whole astronomical year. When the report was first published in 2009, it was prepared for G20 for the first two meetings under the wave of the world's financial crisis of 2008‑2009 and that is why the Report was prepared directly for the meetings which took place, not in the beginning of the year, but during the year. But now, this Report is of separate value of itself and for the Members and that is why probably it would be more useful to provide reports from the beginning of the year, from 1 January to 31 December. But in general, of course, we understand that the Secretariat does tremendous, very important, and valuable work for the Members. We thank the Secretariat and we will continue our support.

CHAD ON BEHALF OF THE LDC GROUP

123. Chair, yesterday we followed the launch of the Secretariat's study entitled "Easing Trade Bottlenecks in Landlocked Developing Countries".

124. This morning, we followed with interest the launch of the third phase of the WTO Chairs Programme, which provides an opportunity not only to increase the awareness of the universities and academic and research institutions that inform our societies about international trade policy, but also to develop linkages with political decision‑makers and officials responsible for formulating and implementing trade policy.

125. Discussion is currently taking place on the report on developments in the international trading environment. It is clear that the WTO's multifaceted work, the relevance and coherence of which have been affirmed and which seeks to firmly establish the spirit of development through trade, is truly interesting.

126. On behalf of the group of least developed countries, I would like to congratulate the Secretariat and the Director‑General and all her team for their commitment and for the efforts made to strengthen this multilateral trading system that is currently suffering a little.

127. The current pandemic is undoubtedly one of the greatest crises this century. Its social and economic effects are still visible. We are meeting at a critical juncture, with the pandemic in full swing. LDCs represent the low‑income‑country category, which is the most affected by the pandemic.

128. Given the lack of diversification in their economies, LDCs have seen a considerable decline in their market share. Inadequate health protection measures, disruption to national transport and supply systems and a lack of digitalization forced the majority of LDC enterprises to close during the pandemic. LDCs have seen a greater decline in exports of goods and services than the rest of the world: 16% for LDCs compared to 12% for the rest of the world in 2020. The pandemic brought the share of LDC exports in world trade down to 0.9% in 2020. All this paints a fairly gloomy picture for LDCs; their performance is suboptimal and the situation must be remedied. The contraction has left LDCs with little fiscal space to drive recovery. LDCs therefore need to further build their productive capacities so as to be able to diversify their production and export base, better integrate into global and regional value chains, generate employment, and lift their populations out of poverty.

129. Chair, allow me to conclude by saying that, given the importance of digital tools in today's world, we feel it would be appropriate for the WTO to help LDCs seize the opportunities provided by e‑commerce so that they can be competitive in markets and meet their development goals. It is therefore necessary to facilitate our market access through technology transfer and to promote trade in our countries, which are the most vulnerable of all.

CHAIRPERSON'S CLOSING REMARKS

130. I think this has been a constructive meeting and we have heard wide support for the transparency which this exercise offers. Overall, Members have responded quickly and cooperated constructively with the Secretariat to further enhance transparency around COVID‑19 related trade measures as well as trade-related measures more generally.

131. Transparency and predictability are essential elements of a healthy and well-functioning international trading system – and more so when a situation changes rapidly and unpredictably. The ability of the monitoring exercise to deliver factual and up-to-date information depends, to a very large extent, on the input of Members. This includes, providing and verifying information which can only be obtained from you, the Members.

132. However, some regions remain underrepresented, and I would like to encourage those who have not been able to participate - to do so in the preparation of future reports.

133. Your timely contributions to the Trade Monitoring Report and your support to the Secretariat is fundamental to ensure and preserve the high quality and accuracy of the reports.

134. Before I close the meeting, I would like to remind you that the next TPRB meeting will take place on 12 and 14 January 2022 when the TPRB will review Georgia's trade policies. I wish you all a restful end-year break. With those words, I hereby close this meeting. Thank you for your participation.

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