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GENERAL COUNCIL

Lamy: “We have resumed negotiations fully across the board”

Director-General Pascal Lamy, in his report to the WTO General Council on 7 February 2007, said that “political conditions are now more favourable for the conclusion of the Round than they have been for a long time”. He added that “political leaders around the world clearly want us to get fully back to business, although we in turn need their continuing commitment”.

Report by the Chairman of the Trade Negotiations Committee

Mr. Chairman, for your last meeting as General Council Chair, I am pleased to be able to report some positive news: we have resumed our negotiations fully across the board.

As I set out at an informal meeting of the TNC one week ago, political conditions are now more favourable for the conclusion of the Round than they have been for a long time. Political leaders around the world clearly want us to get fully back to business, although we in turn need their continuing commitment.

Since the beginning of the year, we have witnessed a number of developments, starting with an increasing level of political engagement and clear signals of renewed commitment to a successful conclusion of the Round. Messages stressing both the importance and the urgency of concluding the negotiations have been coming in from all sides, including the highest political levels. There have also been very welcome expressions of support from business communities and civil society organizations across a broad range of the membership.

In addition to this renewed political impetus, and maybe as a consequence of it, several participants have been stepping up their discussions at various levels to work on possible areas of convergence. Of course, this is not a substitute for the multilateral process, but, at this stage of the negotiations, it is a vital input and I believe we all understand it is necessary.

My remarks at last week’s TNC meeting were circulated in document JOB(07)/12, and I will not repeat them today. There is, however, one aspect which I would like to highlight. In my contacts with participants, which I have intensified since the start of the year, I noted a wide expectation that we should get back to full negotiating mode here in Geneva.

At a recent informal gathering of a number of Ministers hosted by
our Swiss colleagues in Davos, there was clearly a renewed commitment on all sides to put the Doha Round back on track. All the Ministers present at that meeting supported a quick resumption of full scale activity in the different Negotiating Groups and declared that flexibilities were available within their mandates. This confirmed my feeling that we needed to restart the multilateral process fully, to try to reap the benefits of this new mood.

My message to participants at last week’s informal TNC was therefore that we were now back to full negotiating mode. Since then, I have been working with the Negotiating Group Chairs to make this happen. The process here will continue to be bottom up, inclusive and transparent, and it will be lead by the Chairs. This multilateral process will continue to be the main process in our negotiations, and it is the only one where decisions can be taken.

With regard to timing, in my view we should not attempt to set ourselves any false deadlines. We are all very much aware of the urgency of the task ahead, but it is also important to reach a substantive outcome which is acceptable to everyone.

I have told delegations that they must be prepared to engage constructively in this last phase of our work, and I would like to stress that they do so in the full, and shared, conviction that this deal is doable.

On several occasions including at the recent Davos gathering, the proponents of the Cotton Initiative have requested that the WTO convenes a High Level Meeting on Cotton. At the current stage of our work on cotton and following consultations, I would like to announce that a High Level Session of the Consultative Framework on Cotton will take place in Geneva on 15-16 March. We are currently finalising the elements of the programme which I will be circulating to all delegates in the next days, early enough before the meeting to allow everybody a smooth preparation.

Mr. Chairman, we are now writing the last chapter of this long, and sometimes tortuous, story. Last week I compared the title of our book to a well-known American novel, but on reflection Mr. Chairman, perhaps our chef d’oeuvre will resemble more a Norse saga.

That concludes my report. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.