



PRESS RELEASE

RETREAT OF AFRICAN GROUP AMBASSADORS

25-26 April 2016 - Chavannes-de-Bogis

A retreat of Ambassadors of the African Group on WTO issues, jointly organized by the Permanent Delegation of the African Union in Geneva and the Economic Commission United Nations for Africa (ECA) was held at Chavannes-de-Bogis, Switzerland from 25 to 26 April 2016. This retreat aimed at bringing together the stakeholders of trade negotiations at the WTO, and many experts on trade issues to take stock of the results of the Tenth Ministerial Conference held in Nairobi from 15 to 19 December 2015, with a view to preparing the common position of the African Group as part as the Post Nairobi Programme, and in order to exchange views on the negotiations towards the creation of the Zone of continental free trade Area (CFTA).

This retreat was attended by 125 delegates and representatives of intergovernmental organizations and numerous resource personalities, including Representatives of the African Union Commissioner, UNCTAD, ITC, ECA, the WTO, and the Ambassadors to the WTO of the European Union, the United States, Brazil and China and the Chairman of the negotiating Group on agriculture of the WTO.

Legal issues set out in Part III of the Nairobi Ministerial Declaration, were addressed at length discussed and analyzed by the Ambassadors, Experts of the GA, and lecturers from institutions such as the South Centre, the Graduate Institute, University of Manchester, the Advisory Centre on WTO law (OLAC), and the legal Affairs Division of the WTO. A legal analysis on issues of interest to the African Group in respect of specific elements of the DDA, the legal value of the contents of the Nairobi Declaration and its enforceability was thus conducted.

A number of recommendations were made by the Ambassadors at the conclusion of this important retreat. On issues related to public stocks for food security purposes, domestic support and market access, the Ambassadors recommended continuing negotiations and maintaining Rev.4 as a valid basic document for all the pillars of Agriculture. They also recommended that outstanding issues be addressed as a matter of priority in the forthcoming negotiations before embarking on new issues.

Ambassadors recognised that Nairobi has helped making significant progress on market access and the gradual elimination of export subsidies. However, the cotton negotiations have not resulted in a binding decision regarding the issue of domestic support. In this regard, the African Group recommended to continue negotiations on the cotton issue to achieve a fair and balanced agreement for all players and to deal with the issue of domestic support as a priority for future negotiations. C4 urged the GA to take on the cotton issue and make it a priority in view of the CM11.

The Nairobi Ministerial Conference has not yielded the expected results. In this regard, the ambassadors believe that the Group must set priorities for all areas that have not reached consensus. They stressed the importance of the regional integration agenda as a growth engine and the structural transformation of the continent. In this context, consistency between the agenda of continental integration and multilateral negotiations at the WTO was highlighted. They suggested that a new retreat be devoted to regional integration and reaffirmed their commitment to the establishment of the CFTA by 2017 to better engage African Ambassadors accredited to the WTO in the regional integration agenda.

The Nairobi Final Declaration recognizing both that many member states are determined to go to the end of the Doha Round, while other members are not, considering that new approaches are needed to achieve significant results in multilateral negotiations. The ambassadors believe that African countries need to accelerate negotiations within the WTO, form strong alliances, rely on their own achievements, set priorities and propose solutions based on these priorities. To hope to weigh in the balance of power, more coordination and solidarity between African countries is definitely needed.

Ambassadors reaffirmed the need to maintain Special and Differential Treatment, whilst stressing that it is important for some African countries to maintain subsidies in such sectors as small-scale fishing where the need for strengthening capacity remains a major challenge.

More generally, the Ambassadors reiterated the centrality of the Doha Round objectives, and recommended to work towards the resumption of negotiations for the purpose of obtaining new results acquired outside of Nairobi. They reaffirmed that the DDA remains a reference point as there was no consensus to abandon it. Africa must make its regional integration (CFTA) a top priority for circumventing the detrimental mega agreements. Close cooperation should be established with ECA, ITC, UNCTAD, the Commonwealth, the IMF, World Bank and OECD for the establishment of a statistical database that is essential to any rational study.