

INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION DIRECTORATE

Press Release No: /2022

Date: 22nd May 2022

Venue: Geneva, Switzerland.



African Ministers of Trade adopt a Declaration of a common position tabled in Geneva before the 12th WTO Ministerial Conference.

African Ministers of Trade (AMOT) adopted and presented a Declaration of common position at the World Trade Organization (WTO) 12th Ministerial Conference (MC12) held from the 12 June to 15 June 2022 in Geneva, Switzerland. The African Ministers rallied a common position on, inter alia, the WTO Response to the Pandemic, the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Waiver, food security, agriculture and fisheries, and the WTO Reforms. The push for reforms at the WTO is aimed at ensuring the WTO comprehensively addresses matters that have been on its negotiating agenda for years, such as agriculture, disciplines on fisheries subsidies, special and differential treatment for developing and least-developed countries, as well as other institutional matters.

The common position was critical to ensure Africa speaks with one voice and secure a balanced MC12 outcome that takes into account the development needs of African members and provide the necessary flexibilities for developing economies.

In his opening remark, H.E. Luc-Magloire Mbarga Atangana, Minister of Trade for the Republic of Cameroon and Coordinator of the African Ministers on WTO issues, emphasized the need for the African Group of Ministers to work closely together in a coordinated approach. “The African Group of Ambassadors have done a great job putting together the key common issues and the draft declaration. History will hold us accountable if we fail to reach a minimum outcome and it was incumbent upon each head of delegation from AU Member States to put in the effort to achieve key outcomes in the identified priorities as set out in the report from the Retreat of African Ambassadors”, he stated.

Speaking at the African Ministers of Trade preparatory meeting ahead of the WTO MC12, Amb. Albert Muchanga, African Union Commissioner of Economic Development, Trade, Tourism, Industry and Minerals emphasized the need for Africa to re-establish strong supply and value chains at the global, continental, regional and national levels; enhance recovery efforts and address challenges of inflation and

hunger aggravated by the COVID-19 Pandemic; enhance trade export diversification for economic growth and resilience from future shocks; and the continent's commitment to multilateralism and rules-based trade. The Commissioner further noted that with a reformed WTO, the special and differential treatment (SDT) accorded to the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) as part of various WTO agreements could be strengthened to contribute significantly to the global integration of the LDCs in the multilateral trading system.

He stated, "Africa can assist WTO meet her priorities on strengthening the WTO's action on COVID-19, both for the immediate and longer term, by minimizing or removing export restrictions and ensuring access to vaccines and other medical goods; completing fisheries subsidies negotiations; making progress on Joint Statement Initiatives (JSIs), such as e-commerce, domestic regulations, and investment facilitation; and agreeing on the roadmap for reform of the Dispute Settlement System. I also wish to appeal to Honourable Ministers for us to work together and ensure that the WTO MC13 is held on African soil. Ministers will recall that at the 39th Ordinary Session of the African Union Executive Council endorsed the Republic of Cameroun as AU candidate to host MC13."

In her remarks, H.E Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, WTO Director General, emphasized on the importance of reforming the WTO and reinforcing the multilateral trading system to better meet 21st-century challenges such as climate change, addressing the challenges posed by the COVID-19 Pandemic, and warding off a food crisis brought about by the Russia-Ukraine conflict. "Trade should be about development and inclusivity", she noted.

The African Union also sought the Ministers' support in resolving the long-standing issue of the Observer status of the African Union in the WTO. This is particularly urgent as the AU continues with the implementation of the Agreement Establishing the Continental Free Trade Area. With Observer Status, the AUC will be better placed to provide more structured technical support to all African WTO members.

For further information please contact:

Esther Azaa Yambou Tankou | Head of Information Division | Information and Communication Directorate | African Union Commission | **Tel:** (251) 11 551 77 00 | **E-mail:** yamboue@africa-union.org | Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Doreen Apollos | Information and Communication Directorate | African Union Commission | **Tel:** +251 115 517 700 | **E-mail:** ApollosD@africa-union.org | Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Meaza Tezera , Department of Economic Development, Trade , Tourism, Industry and Mining | African Union Commission | E-mail: Meazat@africa-union.org | www.au.int/Addis Ababa | Ethiopia

Information and Communication Directorate, African Union Commission | **E-mail:** DIC@africa-union.org
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