



Africa Trade Network (ATN) Statement Ahead of the Thirteenth Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization (WTO MC13)

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Ahead of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) Thirteenth Ministerial Conference (MC 13) scheduled for 26th to 29th February 2024 in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, we, members of the Africa Trade Network (ATN) support the issues raised by the Africa Group Ambassadors to the WTO leading up to the Ministerial Conference.

Key among the issues raised include the necessity to preserve policy space for industrial development and rebalancing trade rules to promote industrialisation, structural economic transformation as well as tackle emerging challenges of the climate.

We as ATN reiterate the position that the ultimate test of a successful trade policy should be whether it promotes economic diversification, increasing value addition and industrial upgrading without deepening inequality domestically and among nations or contributing to environmental degradation. To achieve this, trade rules should be a catalyst for accelerating structural transformation, industrial development, and diversification in African countries to enable them address inequality and exclusion.

Crucially, we reiterate that trade rules should provide for producers and countries in Africa, the necessary policy space to integrate more meaningfully and qualitatively in global value and supply chains not only as suppliers and exporters of primary products but also as producers of intermediate and final goods. Such meaningful integration should help African countries' economies create decent jobs, develop their industrial, agricultural, and agro-processing sectors, as well as the services sectors in an environment of expanding and deepening industrial capabilities.

Moreover, in an increasingly uncertain global energy supply environment amidst the increasing energy transition dogma, policy space is required to promote green industrialization, as a critical complement to other adaptation and mitigation-related actions to build resilience against climate change.

We also re-echo the fact that the multilateral trading system has a key role to play in ensuring that economic and industrial development opportunities associated with the green transition contribute to the structural transformation of developing countries and their structural position in global production and supply networks. Accordingly, during and post-MC 13, negotiations,

African countries should be cautious about premature tariff liberalization on environmental goods and services associated with the green transition prior to building their own requisite capacities and capabilities in areas of revealed and latent comparative and competitive advantages.

In terms of reforms at the WTO, we argue that sustainable development must be at the centre of WTO [institutional] reforms. Agenda-setting within the different WTO bodies should, therefore, be responsive to and address issues of interest to developing countries, including prioritizing and delivering on longstanding mandates. At the operational level, WTO bodies must respect and operate within their mandated issues and boundaries and ensure that any changes to such mandates are only effected through consensus-based decisions and an inclusive, member-driven process.

We also reiterate that existing procedures for the reporting and addressing of Specific Trade Concerns (STCs) as currently provided for in applicable agreements must be retained without their duplication or extension across all WTO bodies. New approaches that suggest more onerous obligations or burden on limited human and institutional capacities of developing countries, including LDCs, must be avoided.

We as ATN believe that these issues are central to the structural economic transformation of Africa's economies that continue to depend on primary commodities. We urge African Civil Society Organisations as well as other global CSO networks to support this call and be on the lookout for other issues without mandate in the WTO that could derail the interest of Africa.

About the Africa Trade Network (ATN)

The ATN is a coalition of civil society organizations, trade unions, researchers, and activists drawn from across Africa working on trade issues. Founded in 1998, ATN works on World Trade Organisation-related issues, the Economic Partnership Agreement, and other trade and fiscal related issues. ATN seeks to present a coordinated and continent-wide voice that articulates the views of the marginalized and offers alternative policy options relevant for Africa's development.

Credit: Africa Group statement on policy space :

<https://docs.wto.org/dol2fe/Pages/SS/directdoc.aspx?filename=q:/WT/GC/W868.pdf&Open=True>

Africa Group Statement on Institutional Reforms: [WT/GC/W/895](#)

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