

WTO GENERAL COUNCIL MEETING
STATEMENTS MADE BY UNITED STATES AMBASSADOR TO THE WTO
JOSEPH L. BARLOON
MAY 6-7, 2026

- 1. Statement by the Chairperson of the General Council**
- 2. Report by the Chairperson of the Trade Negotiations Committee and Director-General**

At the outset, I want to thank Cameroon. It is a wonderful country and we appreciated the work they did and the hospitality shown.

With respect to the Ministerial Conference itself, it is certainly the case that many positive conversations and developments took pace. However, the United States is disappointed that Members could not deliver on key outcomes at MC14, and we believe that result highlights that the WTO has been unable to address many important trade issues of the day.

As USTR Jamieson Greer stated several times in Yaoundé, the United States believed it important for MC14 to result in adoption of a permanent moratorium on duties on electronic transmissions, for two reasons. First, the moratorium has proven to be an important driver of e-commerce trade that has strong support from a diverse set of industry stakeholders around the world. Second, the issue of whether the WTO would adopt a permanent e-commerce moratorium was a litmus test in that the results would show whether the WTO could still be relevant.

Although the United States and its 24 co-sponsors strongly believed in a permanent moratorium, we showed great flexibility. With great difficulty, we found it possible to accept an extension until December 31, 2030. Given this unprecedented extension, we also could have accepted new language on development issues in the decision, including calls for addressing the digital divide, targeted technical assistance, and encouragement for Members to increase contributions to the Global Trust Fund. This is far beyond where we have been able to go in the past.

In addition, although the United States strongly believes that the NVNI Moratorium is harmful, we agreed on an extension of the moratorium that would mirror the length of the e-commerce one as part of a compromise solution.

While this compromise package was supported by 164 members, two members did not support it.

We were disappointed at this result, and we know many other Members shared our disappointment, particularly since so much progress had been achieved. At the request of the Ministerial Conference Chair, Members were asked to hold the Yaoundé Package offer open until the May General Council meeting to give Members an opportunity to reconsider.

The United States has respected that time-bound request. But we have been clear: Our compromise offer remains open up to, and only up to, the conclusion of the May General Council meeting.

Unfortunately, despite numerous efforts on the part of many Members over the past month, including the United States, it appears that we still do not have consensus.

The failure to achieve consensus on the e-commerce moratorium means that the NVNI moratorium, which lapsed at the conclusion of the Ministerial Conference, will not be resurrected, and Members may proceed with non-violation or situation complaints.

The failure to achieve consensus on the e-commerce moratorium also means that the WTO will not have an e-commerce work program and that the compromise language regarding e-commerce and development will not be adopted. Unfortunately, the e-commerce work program never achieved what it was intended to achieve, and if there is to be any useful work in this area at the WTO, a fresh start is needed. Likewise, history has shown that it is often the case that vague development language starts with the best of intentions and ends with the worst of results.

More significantly, the failure to achieve consensus on the Yaoundé Package reinforces that the WTO has not been capable of achieving significant results on a multilateral basis – in our view, if there is to be a future at the WTO for negotiations, it will be plurilateral negotiations.

In that regard, the United States is moving forward in seeking reform that is pragmatic and achievable and moving forward on a plurilateral approach to provide more certainty and predictability to electronic commerce.

With respect to reform, the experience of the Ministerial Conference showed that adoption of the flawed “Reform Work Program” would be an exercise in burying our heads in the sand, and would harm rather than help, real reform efforts.

We need to move forward. We encourage the GC Chair to launch a new, Member-driven process on reform that builds on the work already undertaken, and we have confidence in the GC Chair’s judgment and ability to lead this effort. In the meantime, the United States will work with Members who have a real interest in improving the WTO through concrete actions.

With respect to the e-commerce moratorium, while the United States has agreements outside the WTO with the majority of its major trading partners that prohibit duties on electronic transmissions, we also see value in a WTO-focused commitment, in particular a commitment that could lead to a multilateral agreement at some point. In that regard, the United States and more than a dozen other Members will issue at the conclusion of the GC a communication that announces a plurilateral commitment among this group of Members that we will not impose customs duties on electronic transmissions among ourselves. We welcome and encourage other Members to sign onto this plurilateral e-commerce moratorium.

The U.S. efforts on reform and e-commerce do not close the door to multilateral engagement. But the United States will not sit idly and wait for 166 Members to agree on common-sense solutions to respond to the needs of our stakeholders. We look forward to working with other Members on these important issues.

8. Preserving the Spirit of Open and Predictable Trade: Collective Restraint Against Actions Undermining Trade Liberalization – Request from the Republic of Korea

We have several initial reactions to some of the comments we've heard today.

We heard reference to tariffs and modifying concessions to address overcapacity in industrial sectors as “short-term tools to protect specific domestic industries”. It was further stated that if such measures are a routine policy instrument, they risk weakening the rules-based system.

We think this view misjudges the serious and urgent situation that many Members face. The trading system has been severely undermined by the beggar-thy-neighbor policies driving persistent overcapacity in steel and other industrial sectors, not by the actions Members are forced to take to address the crisis.

The idea that the countries damaged by persistent overcapacity should resign themselves to “collective restraint” fails to grasp the gravity of the situation. The idea that we should wait to act until we have perfect information, including from countries that seem committed to not being transparent, also fails to grasp the gravity of the situation.

We face an urgent, shared challenge related to trade and economic security. Over the past few decades, we have seen increasing global imbalances caused in part by persistent structural excess capacity in steel and other industrial sectors.

We tried to work within the international trading system to correct these challenges. But the current system has proven too inflexible, slow-moving, and ineffective.

Systemic issues have persisted and even worsened over time, leading the United States to conclude that a new approach is needed to properly account for and protect our market from the global market distortions emanating from sources of excess capacity.

For our own part, the United States is implementing effective actions to address the worsening crisis in the global steel industry and its impact on our workers and producers. Overcapacities caused by non-market policies and practices displace producers globally, resulting in trade diversion and lost opportunities for all of our manufacturers.

The United States calls on like-minded partners to take similar effective actions to more fully address persistent and structural excess capacity and the market distortions it causes.

The United States welcomes a conversation with all interested Members about how we can think differently about managing our trade relationships, including how we may take complementary and effective actions that strengthen our shared economic security interests.