WTO GENERAL COUNCIL MEETING
March 10-12, 2026
United States Statements as delivered
Ambassador Joseph L. Barloon

PREPARATIONS FOR MC14

1. Report by the Chairperson of the Trade Negotiations Committee and Director-General

2. Reports by the General Council Chairperson, the Facilitator on WTO Reform, the Facilitator of the Work Programme on Electronic Commerce, as well as Other Chairpersons

Intervention on the WTO Reform Facilitator report:

We thank the facilitator for his report and draft workplan.

Like many Members, the United States sees the benefits of detailed workplan that identifies with specificity the scope and modalities of the reform process through MC15.

And like many Members, we welcome the progress made over the past 9 months, and share the sense of optimism on the nature and tone of the discussions so far.

Having said that, we have to be honest with ourselves: the discussions are not sufficiently mature to allow for a workplan that concretely and with specificity defines the work going forward.

And the draft workplan implicitly acknowledges this fact. To build consensus, the draft relies on ambiguous or vague language, and introduces new terms and concepts to get Members onboard.

We understand the reason for this, but we think it is dangerous.

In our view, rather than accelerating our work after the Ministerial, as some suggest, we believe the discussion will be slowed by debates over the meaning of these new "mandates".

This is because it is clear that we do not have a shared understanding of this text.

One example is on SDT. We heard last week and again yesterday that some view the SDT language in the workplan's Annex as *reaffirming* Doha and as a call to strengthen SDT. As Members know, we disagree and believe SDT needs to be reformed.

This substantive disagreement is fine, and to be expected given the early stage of discussions.

But we should not describe issues through ambiguous language in a Ministerial statement that will then become the subject of debate, rather than the issue itself. We have been down this road.

Or consider the workplan's call to "examine how rules can more effectively enable integration into global value chains in a manner that supports economic growth and prosperity, while ensuring appropriate policy space for industrialization, structural transformation, and economic diversification."

To the proponents: how do they understand this language? And more importantly, how do they consider this language to help propel our work forward after the Ministerial?

In our view, prolonged debates over the meaning and scope of language in the workplan will distract rather than focus our discussions after the Ministerial.

Accordingly, we cannot accept a workplan that in our view undermines our collective efforts to move forward

But let me be clear: the United States has an ambitious reform agenda and we welcome hearing of other Members' ambitious reform agendas.

Moreover, we do not intend to start from scratch after MC14, and we consider the facilitator's report to be one of several inputs to the reform effort going forward. Other key inputs will be the Ministerial discussion at MC14, Members' submissions, and the facilitator's previous reports. We have every expectation that these materials, collectively, will both inform and guide our engagement.

In closing, we again thank the facilitator for his efforts on the workplan, and thank him for the report. We look forward to building on the work described in the report after the Ministerial, as the process transitions to discussions centered around concrete proposals and reforms.

Intervention on the Moratorium on Customs Duties on Electronic Commerce

Approving an open-ended moratorium at MC-14 will deliver stability and predictability for all traders, while demonstrating that the WTO can deliver tangible results for consumers and businesses.

Failure to do so would create uncertainty in digital commerce as Member governments could at any time erect a complex and costly regulatory structure that would stifle growth and innovation.

Such a failure, in addition, would further undermine confidence that the WTO can deliver meaningful results.

We all have an opportunity to deliver a big win in Yaounde for our consumers, for our businesses, and for the WTO. Let us seize that and not let it pass us by.

3. Views and Updates on Ongoing Efforts by Members

4. Appointment of Officers to WTO Bodies

5. Decision on G-90 Proposal on SPS and TBT – Communication from the G-90 (WT/GC/W/974/Rev.1 – TN/C/W/92/Rev.1 – JOB/TN/CTD/19/Rev.1) – Request from South Africa

The United States takes note of the G90 Group revised communication.

We have a few comments and edits, which we have shared with the proponents. We are not in a position to adopt the decision today.

6. WTO Accessions: 2025 Annual Report by the Director-General (WT/ACC/49 – WT/GC/281) – Statement by the Director-General

7. Contribution of Paraguay to the Discussions on WTO Reform – Request from Paraguay

We thank Paraguay for its contribution to the discussion and welcome Members bringing forward concrete proposals that allow us to engage with one another directly.

Paraguay's proposal reflects an ambitious workplan. It details modalities and timelines that would enable us to return to Geneva after MC14 with a clear sense of direction. The proposal would support our effort to immediately shift focus back to substance – which we are eager to do.

I will briefly highlight three elements of the proposal that we support.

First, the draft does not prejudice the substance of discussions, which we understand to be a sensitivity for many delegations. It instead focuses on process – providing a roadmap of how work will be organized after MC14, building on the substantive work we have done thus far.

Second, the draft envisions a Member-driven approach that prioritizes Member submissions and proposals.

And third, the draft incorporates many features that delegations have identified as important to them – timelines, checkpoints, and a clear objective.

Based on these elements, we think this document could be a basis for further discussion.

8. WTO Reform – More Relevant, More Flexible, More Accessible – Request from the United Kingdom

The United States thanks the United Kingdom for its paper, which we consider to be a positive contribution to the reform discussions.

We agree with much of the United Kingdom's diagnosis of the challenges confronting the WTO. For example, we agree that the WTO was premised on an assumption that economic models would converge on open, market-oriented systems. That assumption was not just wrong, it was foolish. Thirty years later, we are instead confronted by a global economy of different economic models with, as the UK paper puts it: "fundamental incompatibilities."

From our perspective, the maintenance of certain economic models has produced massive disruptions to the trading system, leading to overcapacity, overconcentration, distortionary practices, and concerns over excessive trade imbalances – all of which are consequences identified in the UK's paper.

The UK's diagnosis reflects the current reality. A genuine reform effort must start by clarifying the role of the WTO in light of this reality, and then undertaking the specific reforms needed to realize that role.

The United States envisions a limited role for the WTO in addressing these significant challenges.

This assessment is based on (a) the realities of multilateral negotiations,(b) a clear-eyed understanding of the governments that would have to overhaul their economic models, and (c) our experience. For years, we have faced the consequences of the WTO's inability to discipline trade distortive practices that have produced extraordinary global trade imbalances.

In light of this assessment, we believe the WTO may continue to serve as an important forum for discussing such issues.

But, Members must work both inside and outside the WTO to defend our economies from trade distortive practices. We welcome partners that wish to work with us in this regard.

We thank the United Kingdom for the paper and we look forward to engaging further in future discussions and communications.

9. China's Position Paper on WTO Reform under the Current Circumstances – Communication from China (WT/GC/W/989)

The United States welcomes Members' papers and contributions to the reform discussions.

Such contributions, including China's position paper and its presentation today, enable each of us to undertake the important process of identifying areas of shared interests or commonality, and areas of disagreement.

We view such a process as an important piece of the reform discussion: the WTO cannot do everything for all people. Given this fact, we must understand where overlap exists among Members on the proper role for a reformed WTO.

For the United States, a reformed WTO does not mean a "strengthened" or "bigger" WTO: either in terms of the number of mandates, the size of the Secretariat, or the quantity of publications or databases.

Rather, we believe the WTO should focus on what it can do well and where it can add value. We look forward to engaging on concrete ideas on how this can be achieved.