WTO Members Adopt Framework Package for Doha Round

Round-the-Clock Meetings Produce 'Historic' Breakthrough

The WTO's 147 member governments approved on 31 July 2004 a package of framework and other agreements, which Director-General Supachai Panitchpakdi said will greatly enhance members' chances for successfully completing the important Doha negotiations.

Although these frameworks are not final agreements they do include significant commitments, which Dr Supachai was able to describe as a “truly historic” achievement.

Gruelling Sessions Yield Results

These commitments were negotiated intensively day and night for two weeks, culminating in a gruelling, non-stop session involving key ministers and ambassadors, that began at 5pm on Friday 30 July and lasted almost 24 hours. During the fortnight, there were several meetings of heads of delegations, intensive consultations and countless gatherings of various groups, with a number of trade ministers participating.

During the General Council meeting many delegates commented that the deadlock of the Cancún Ministerial Conference has now been broken.

Dr Supachai shared that view. Afterwards, Dr Supachai listed the achievements:

“For the first time, member governments have agreed to abolish all forms of agricultural export subsidies by a date certain. They have agreed to substantial reductions in trade distorting domestic support in agriculture.

“As part of this agreement we have achieved a significant breakthrough in cotton trade which offers great opportunity for cotton farmers in West Africa and throughout the developing world. This is a real demonstration that this organization can take care of the plight of the poor of the countries that participate in the system.

“Governments have agreed to launch negotiations to set new rules streamlining trade and customs procedures. We have assigned ourselves ambitious guidelines for opening trade in manufactured products and we have set ourselves a clear agenda for improving rules that are of great benefit to developing countries.

“As importantly, WTO governments have sharpened the focus of the Doha round and provided a foundation which will enable negotiators to continue these talks from significantly higher level; greatly enhancing our chances for successful completion of these important talks,” he said.

Dr Supachai predicted that the progress now made in agriculture, non-agricultural market access, development issues and trade facilitation would provide substantial momentum to WTO members' work in other important areas such as rules, services, environment, reform of dispute procedures and intellectual property protection.

“I fully expect that when negotiators return in September negotiations in these areas and all others will recommence with a high degree of enthusiasm,” he said.
"WTO members can now put behind them the deadlock 10 months earlier at the Cancún ministerial conference," he said.

"Although we were disappointed with that outcome, we have seen here today that with political courage, commitment and sheer hard work, governments of the WTO are capable of achieving great things," he said.

**Rewards of 'Arduous' Work**

General Council chairperson Shotaro Oshima, Japan's ambassador to the WTO, said the text "has emerged from an arduous process of discussions and negotiations".

Just before he presented the text for the Council to adopt by consensus, he paid tribute to the ministers, negotiators and others "for their hard work and patience of these past few days and beyond. There has been a tremendous amount of committed work by all delegations to get us to where we are, and I am grateful for the spirit of cooperation and goodwill shown by all."

**The Decision**

The final compromises in the package were negotiated in the last 24 hours by a group of key delegations, including representatives of all the coalitions that have been active in the latest phase of the talks. General Council chairperson Oshima presided. During the consultations those representatives also consulted their coalitions.

The resulting draft decision was then discussed and endorsed in an informal meeting of heads of delegations of all WTO members, which began at 10pm on 31 July. Once a consensus had been established, it was immediately confirmed in a formal meeting of the General Council.

During the heads of delegations and General Council meetings several members highlighted where they had reservations, where they had yielded in order to achieve consensus, or how they interpreted the way ahead under the package.

The decision takes the form of an opening main section covering: agriculture; cotton; non-agricultural market access (or market access for industrial products); development (including general principles, special and differential treatment, technical assistance, implementation issues, other development issues and least-developed countries); services; other negotiating bodies (rules, trade and environment, intellectual property and dispute settlement); trade facilitation and the three other "Singapore issues" (investment, competition policy, transparency in government procurement); and other parts of the Doha work programme.

Annexed are more details:

* a framework for "modalities" for the final agreement in agriculture. Although a framework, the annex runs to 7 pages. It includes outlines for formulas for reducing import barriers, export subsidies and domestic support, which would then be turned into complete formulas in the "modalities";
* a 3-page framework for agreement "modalities in market access for non-agricultural products;
* a 1-page recommendation on the services negotiations;
* a 2-page annex containing "modalities" (methods) for the negotiations on trade facilitation that have now been launched.

The decision includes some new dates:

* a deferred deadline for the negotiations beyond the original 1 January 2005;
* the next ministerial conference (December 2005 in Hong Kong, China);
* recommendations on special and differential treatment by July 2005;
* revised market opening offers in services by May 2005; and
* on implementation issues a report to the Trade Negotiations Committee and General Council by May 2005 with any appropriate action taken by the Council by July 2005.