

WTO Ministerial Meeting of Developing Countries concludes in New Delhi

A year ago, on 19-20 March 2018, India had hosted an Informal WTO Ministerial Gathering, in which more than 50 Members – both developed and developing – had participated. Providing a platform for the like-minded nations to express their views at re-energizing the multilateral trading system, and re-endorsing the centrality of development in WTO negotiations while providing suggestions for reforms, WTO Ministerial Meeting of Developing Countries was hosted by India in New Delhi on 13-14 May 2019. The two-day meeting was attended by 23 WTO Member States.

A strong case was made for filling up vacancies in the WTO appellate body, and it was observed that delay in the appointment would hamper the functioning of the system, which is fundamental for fair global trade as it provides security and predictability to the multilateral trading system. The ministerial conclave declaration, signed by 17 ministers, warned that the current impasse over appointments to the WTO appellate body could “completely paralyze” the dispute settlement mechanism.

WTO Director-General Roberto Azevêdo, speaking at the meeting, addressed the impact of rising trade tensions on trade expansion and global economic growth. Whilst observing that the informal meeting comprised a representative group that could contribute significantly to the process of understanding the present situation of, and the way forward for, the WTO, he urged these Member States present to make their voices heard.

The conclave included India, China, South Africa, Malaysia, Indonesia, Bangladesh and Nigeria, among other developing countries. The feasibility of stalling the attempts by the U.S. and other Western countries to define what constitutes “developing nations” within the scheme of WTO was discussed at the behest of India and China, as that could strip the developing countries of flexibility they enjoyed in their trade and tariff regimes.

Further, the declaration stressed that provisions for special and differential treatment are rights of developing Member States, and those must be preserved and strengthened in all WTO agreements.