



The Hon Craig Emerson MP Minister for Trade

Address to the Plenary Session of the 8th Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization

Geneva

15 December 2011

Thank you Mr Chair. I want to say at the outset that I am not a diplomat and therefore I will speak very frankly. The Doha Round is blocked. It is at an impasse.

Ten years of a business-as-usual approach has failed - has failed.

This is deeply disappointing for all of us, but most particularly for the poorest countries on earth. This has been an abrogation of responsibility on the part of WTO Members to the poorest countries on earth.

We have, particularly in the northern hemisphere, very slow economic growth. We need a new sustainable source of stimulus to ensure there is a global economic recovery.

And the only sustainable source of stimulus is through trade liberalisation.

At the same time, while we are seeking to liberalise trade we must resist protectionism in all its forms.

Mr Chair, there are many paths to the mountain top and Australia has been advocating a new pathway in recognition of the fact that the Round has stalled.

So, we strongly support the WTO General Council statement of 30 November, which has actually been agreed by all Members, and it has several essential features.

First, it embraces the notion of different approaches, of a new pathway.

Second, it provides a focus on components of the Doha Declaration where we can reach agreement on a provisional or definitive basis earlier than full conclusion of the single undertaking.

And third, it says we fully respect the development component of the Doha Round.

This argues for breaking the round into its component parts, and it would allow the least developed countries to benefit earlier instead of waiting for some grand bargain, magically, like a bolt from the blue, to strike us from the sky.

This is not going to happen. It has eluded us for a decade.

So what are the sorts of priorities that we should consider?

Well, least developed countries: it is obvious, and Australia has committed to 100 per cent duty-free, quota-free access for the least developed countries of the world.

Trade facilitation will be of benefit to all countries of the world, but including the least developed and other developing countries of the world.

As Chair of the Cairns Group, of course, we would advocate agricultural trade liberalisation in all its forms.

Other items that can be considered for priority and early harvest are services, environmental goods and services, non-tariff barriers, strengthening anti-dumping disciplines, fisheries subsidies, and we would argue for regional trade agreements to ensure that they are of high quality and contribute to the multilateral system.

We need a strong statement on resisting protectionism. We will be making a strong statement on resisting protectionism after this meeting.

We are very concerned about statements such as “policy space”, if that means an excuse to increase tariffs and non-tariff barriers.

We will commit \$18 million to trade facilitation to support the least developed countries on earth in this great endeavour.

We have a responsibility.

We should support the Director-General. We should support the Chairman.

We should support the system and get on with the job of liberalising trade around the world for the benefit of everyone, but most particularly for the poorest countries on earth.