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2023 Commonwealth Trade Ministers Meeting Outcome Statement

DELIVERING A COMMON FUTURE: CO-OPERATION FOR RESILIENT, INCLUSIVE, GREEN AND DIGITAL ECONOMIES

1. The Trade Ministers of the Commonwealth met on 5-6 June 2023 at Marlborough House in London to build upon the initiatives agreed by our Heads of Government in Kigali, Rwanda, in June 2022.
2. We exchanged views on current issues and challenges facing the global economy, marked by multiple and interconnected crises, and emphasised the importance of building inclusive, sustainable and resilient economies for post-COVID recovery. As we approach the mid-point of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda, we recognise the need for enhanced collaboration and strengthened partnerships to ensure that trade and investment contributes to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, especially in developing, least developed countries and small and vulnerable economies.

Supporting the Multilateral Trading System

3. We reaffirmed our strong commitment to a transparent, inclusive, non-discriminatory, fair and open rules-based multilateral trading system, with the WTO at its core, and reiterated concerns about the risk of WTO-inconsistent protectionist measures and unfair trading practices that threaten the rules-based trading system. The multilateral trading system has a key role to play in addressing global challenges including supporting the post-COVID global economic recovery and achieving the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.
4. We discussed the outcomes from the WTO's 12th Ministerial Conference in June 2022 and reaffirmed the importance we attach to achieving fair and balanced outcomes at the upcoming 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) in February 2024.
5. We urged Members to conclude negotiations on outstanding issues from Ministerial decisions. In particular, in relation to the desire to ratify and implement the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies, including with the support of the Fisheries Funding Mechanism. We encourage Members to conclude negotiations with respect to the Agreement, with due regard to the principle of special and differential treatment.
6. We call for continued reform of the multilateral trading rules for agriculture and the smooth functioning of supply chains, with a view towards achieving reductions in trade distorting support and protection, to enhance food security, especially for net food importing developing countries.

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7. We recognise that member countries have differing views and official positions on various issues on the WTO agenda, such as public stockholding for food security purposes. We underscored the importance of continuing discussions on these issues.
8. We underline the importance and urgency of restoring a fully and well-functioning dispute settlement system that is accessible to all Members by 2024.
9. We urge members to decide on an extension of the TRIPS waiver to cover the production and supply of COVID-19 diagnostics and therapeutics.
10. We also encourage members to actively engage in the e-commerce work programme, in particular the development dimension, including on the moratorium on customs duties on electronic transmissions.
11. We recognise the ongoing discussions on policy coherence between trade and investment with industrial policy and note the role that regional economic integration can play in strengthening the participation of member countries in the multilateral trading system.
12. We recognise the importance of the global agricultural and food systems, underpinned by WTO rules, bringing food, fibre, and other critical products to people all over the world. Despite its importance for ensuring global food security and sustainable economic development, agriculture remains one of the most protected sectors in global trade. We recognise the need for a meaningful outcome on agriculture at the WTO, reflecting our collective interests and sensitivities, with a view towards achieving substantial progressive reductions in trade-distorting support and protection to enhance food security, as envisaged in the continuation of the agricultural reform process provided in Article 20 of the WTO Agreement on Agriculture and existing mandates.
13. We reflected on the role the Commonwealth can play to support and strengthen the multilateral trading system. We endorsed the proposal for the Government of Rwanda as the Chair-in-Office to deliver an agreed joint statement to MC13. Furthermore, we welcome initiatives by the Secretariat to support members with their preparations for MC13 and to assess the outcomes of the Ministerial Conference.
14. We encourage Commonwealth members of the WTO to work across regional blocks to address the sensitivities of member countries and to accelerate convergence, where possible.
15. We noted the discussions of the Commonwealth Caucus group in Geneva, convened by New Zealand, and encouraged the group to continue this informal exchange of views in the lead-up to MC13, while respecting the different views of member countries.
16. We noted the report on 'Trade, Climate Change and Natural Disasters', as mandated by Trade Ministers, and mandated that it be further discussed at the next Caucus Meeting in Geneva.

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17. We expressed our shared commitment to deepen collaboration to support all members, especially developing countries, including least developed countries, small states and small island developing states, to participate effectively and on an equal footing in the multilateral trading system and reap the gains from international trade. We noted the crucial support provided to Commonwealth small states through the Commonwealth Small States Office (CSSO) in Geneva and reiterated the importance of maintaining this support.
18. We further agreed to facilitate technology and knowledge transfer, including to improve the capacity of Commonwealth members to engage in policy formulation on issues within the multilateral trading system and to appropriately assess the impact of different trade and trade-related environmental policy options on developmental outcomes to better align the policies formulated in the multilateral trading system with the targets in the Sustainable Development Goals.

Deepening Commonwealth Trade and Investment

19. We noted the progress in intra-Commonwealth trade and investment and recognise the need for more ambitious action to grow intra-Commonwealth trade to US\$2 trillion by 2030. We noted the ongoing support provided by the Secretariat to improve trade competitiveness in member countries and discussed practical ways to increase this support, especially to build members' capacity to grow and diversify exports, enhance trade and investment facilitation, and integrate effectively into the global trading system.
20. We welcomed the recognition of the crucial role of investment in transforming economies by Commonwealth Leaders at CHOGM 2022. We agreed that strengthening intra-Commonwealth trade and investment should be a priority for the Commonwealth. We committed to working together to explore mutually beneficial investment initiatives and partnerships across the Commonwealth, particularly those which support high quality investment in infrastructure, including clean, green infrastructure, as cornerstones of sustainable economic growth as well as in productive capacity.
21. We support the reconvening of the Working Group on Trade and Investment (either physically or virtually) to discuss ways of deepening intra-Commonwealth trade and investment.
22. We mandate an initial focus of a sub-action group of the Working Group on Trade and Investment to generate an investment plan of action. The Group will update members at regular intervals, with tangible proposals to increase investment flows, to be agreed by Heads of Government at CHOGM.
23. We noted the update on the work of the Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda and the operationalisation of the Commonwealth Connectivity Action Plan; and commended the respective cluster leads for shaping the direction and focus of the five connectivity clusters in partnership with the cluster members. We further recognised the need for the mobilisation of additional resources to upscale the work of the clusters.
24. We welcomed the Secretariat's work on international trade policy, particularly the research, policy and capacity building support to member countries to

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develop and implement their trade policies, including through strengthened partnerships with UNCTAD, the WTO and the ITC.

25. We encourage the Secretariat to deepen trade policy support and capacity building and call on members who may be in a position to do so to provide technology transfer and financial support for developing countries, least developed countries and small and vulnerable economies, including small island developing states and landlocked developing countries, given their unique national circumstances and respective capabilities. In particular, we request the Secretariat to work with least developed countries to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and implement and monitor the Doha Programme of Action for the decade 2022-2031, and to support member countries with the ratification and implementation of the WTO Fisheries Subsidies Agreement.
26. We noted progress on the biennial Commonwealth Trade Review, which will be presented at the next Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in 2024.

Inclusive and Sustainable Trade

27. We note that trade and investment can play a role in addressing global challenges, including enabling food security, bridging the global digital divide, empowering women, youth and other vulnerable groups in trade, collaborating and supporting the sustainable energy transition, halting and reversing biodiversity loss in the ocean and on land, co-operating for managing the risks and challenges arising from climate change, and promoting sustainable development in its economic, social and environmental dimensions, in a manner consistent with the respective needs and concerns of members at different levels of economic development.
28. The Commonwealth provides a valuable platform to exchange knowledge and experiences about the role of trade and investment in inclusive and sustainable development and we call for greater collaboration in this regard. We underline that trade-related measures taken to tackle climate change and other environmental challenges should not constitute a means of arbitrary or unjustifiable discrimination or disguised restrictions on international trade. We urge our trade partners to give full consideration to the impact of the implementation of such measures, especially on members of the Commonwealth, and to provide the requisite assistance.
29. We further acknowledge that this kind of partnership can help to facilitate continued growth in both intra-Commonwealth and international trade across all levels of development while assisting developing member countries with achieving compliance, over time, with trade standards in a way that drives sustainability in climate change mitigation and other areas, including through technical assistance and capacity building, technology transfer and financial support. In this regard, we encourage the Secretariat to facilitate collaboration amongst the member countries.
30. We recognise that women continue to face barriers to full and equal participation in the economy and international trade. We are committed to promoting women's economic empowerment and increasing opportunities for women-owned businesses to trade, including by facilitating capacity building programmes providing targeted support for businesses and fostering an enabling

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business environment. We expressed our deep appreciation for the ongoing work on gender and youth mainstreaming undertaken by the Secretariat and encouraged such efforts to continue, working in partnership, where feasible, with other Commonwealth accredited organisations.

31. We reflected on the Bridgetown Initiative and noted its potential benefits in addressing the financing challenges of climate vulnerable countries and the long-term financing needs of the Sustainable Development Goals.
32. We reflected on how the Commonwealth can promote trade and trade policy as solutions for addressing the climate crisis, including through promoting sustainable production, trade and supply chains, and encouraging access to affordable technologies and enhanced access to climate finance; and note efforts to address environmentally harmful subsidies and contribute to the development of blue and green economies in a manner consistent with the respective needs and concerns of Members at different levels of economic development, in the light of different country circumstances and respective capabilities. We noted the WTO fora available for co-operation and information sharing in support of these objectives, particularly the potential of the Committee on Trade and Environment to progress these deliberations.
33. We emphasised the importance of exchanging knowledge on good practices and local solutions to help mitigate and adapt to climate change and engage in green economy and trade as part of a just transition to a lower-carbon future. We acknowledge that an appropriately designed industrial strategy can support this transition and meet the Sustainable Development Goals.

Fostering Digital Transition

34. We reflected on how the Commonwealth, both collectively and as individual member countries, can support an inclusive digital transformation for all and facilitate digital trade for growth and development, with a particular focus on supporting micro, small and medium enterprises. We emphasised the importance of enabling everyone, everywhere to access the benefits of technological change and innovation. To this end, we stressed the need to address the digital divide and digital skills gaps, with particular attention to supporting marginalised, disadvantaged and vulnerable groups to access digital skills.
35. We emphasised the need to develop digital public infrastructure and connectivity and ensure digital technologies are accessible and affordable for all. We underscored the importance of enabling access to digital financial services as part of an inclusive digital ecosystem and the need to develop efficient cross-border digital payment systems to support digital trade.
36. We exchanged views on the merits of designing robust, supportive and effective regulatory frameworks to govern and facilitate digital trade and the broader operation of the digital economy. We noted the opportunities for Commonwealth members on co-operation in promoting coherence in regulatory and policy frameworks governing digital trade and the digital economy.
37. We agreed to establish a Legal Reform and Digitalisation Working Group under the Connectivity Agenda's Business-to-Business Cluster, with the support of other

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clusters within the Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda, to assist Commonwealth members in moving towards paperless trade.

38. We discussed the need to strengthen the capacity of developing countries to engage in digital trade and to build human capacity in all our member countries to empower individuals - particularly women and youth - and businesses to harness the potential of the digital economy and digital trade.
39. We expressed our shared commitment to deepen pan-Commonwealth co-operation in the digital economy and digital trade particularly moving towards increasing digitisation of trade and paperless trade, and noted the continued role of the Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda in supporting collaboration, sharing of best practice and experience, and providing support to member countries in the promotion of intra-Commonwealth trade.

Towards CHOGM 2024 and Beyond

40. With a view to deepening Commonwealth co-operation in the areas highlighted above, we recommended that our Heads of Government reflect on these issues when they meet in Apia, Samoa, for the 2024 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting.