

ICC BRIEFING ON WTO MC14

16 March 2026

This note provides an update on the key issues, processes, and potential decisions currently under discussion in the lead-up to the WTO's 14th Ministerial Conference (MC14), for the information of ICC Global Trade & Investment Commission members. This briefing note is not intended to cover every issue that could be discussed at MC14; please see previous ICC briefings for additional background.

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I. OVERVIEW

The World Trade Organization (WTO) will hold MC14 in Yaoundé, Cameroon on 26-29 March. MC14 will be chaired by H.E. Luc Magloire Mbarga Atangana, Minister of Trade for Cameroon. He will be supported by three Vice Chairs who are: Minister Kamina Johnson Smith of Jamaica, Minister Todd McClay of New Zealand, and Minister Francisco Tiu-Laurel of the Philippines. The Vice Chairs play a supportive role, helping to facilitate small group negotiations and deputising for the Chair where necessary.

Ministerial facilitators

The WTO Director General, Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, has also appointed the following Ministers to help support the negotiations as facilitators.

- **Coordinator for WTO Reform** – Espen Barth Eide, Norway Minister of Foreign Affairs
- **WTO Reform:**
 - Han-Koo Yeo, Korea Trade Minister
 - Todd McClay, New Zealand Minister of several portfolios (also Vice Chair of MC14)
 - Chris Bryant, UK Minister of State of Trade
 - Grace Fu, Singapore Minister-in-Charge of Trade Relations
 - Manuel Tovar Rivera, Costa Rica Minister of Foreign Trade
- **E-Commerce Work Programme and Moratorium** – Kamina Johnson Smith, Jamaica Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade
- **Investment Facilitation** – Jumoke Oduwole, Nigeria Minister of Industry together with Dwight Fitzgerald Bramble, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade
- **Development including LDC issues** – Luc Magloire Mbarga Atangana, Cameroon Minister of Trade (who also serves as Chair of MC14).
- **Agriculture** – Syed Tauqir Hussain Shah, Pakistan Federal Minister
- **Fisheries Subsidies** – Francisco Tiu-Laurel, The Philippines Secretary of Agriculture (also the Vice-Chairperson MC14)

Overarching themes

The WTO DG has communicated to Members three broad topics for discussion at MC14:

1. Reaffirming the relevance and resilience of the WTO amid global uncertainty.
2. Underscoring the need to reposition and reform the WTO.
3. Highlighting issues of particular concern to Africa and the wider WTO membership, including agriculture, development, and policy space for industrial development.

II. Ministerial agenda (indicative)

Date	Activity
24-25 March	Side events, bilateral and group meetings
25 March	WTO-ICC Business Day
26 March	Opening ceremony
27 March	Breakout sessions on: 1. Decision-making 2. WTO Reform 3. Development and S&DT 4. Level-playing field issues WTO Reform Transparency Plenary
28 March	Update on Dispute Settlement Reform Ministerial Sessions on: 1. Fisheries Subsidies 2. IFDA Incorporation 3. E-Commerce Work Programme & Moratorium 4. Development (LDC issues)
29 March	Closing session

III. WTO Reform

The WTO Director General appointed H.E. Ambassador Olberg (Norway) as a facilitator on WTO reform. As part of his work, Ambassador Olberg has conducted many small- and large-group meetings.

Facilitator draft WTO Statement on Reform

In advance of last week's General Council meeting, a written report ([JOB/GC/491](#) – only available to WTO Members) was prepared by Facilitator H.E. Mr. Petter Ølberg. It was designed to support Members' discussion on WTO reform at the 10-11 March General Council. The document outlines the organisation of work into three indicative tracks: Governance (institutional issues), Fairness (level playing field), and Issues of Our Time (such as supply chain resilience and AI).

The Facilitator emphasised that while there is strong momentum and shared commitment among Members to make the WTO more responsive and relevant, significant divergences persist regarding the root causes of institutional gridlock and the appropriate methods for achieving reform.

The report further explores substantive scoping work on key issues such as decision-making, development, and a level playing field. On decision-making, Members reaffirm the importance of consensus but debate how to prevent it from causing paralysis, with some suggesting plurilateral agreements or the operationalisation of Article IX. On the Fairness track, the document highlights the complexity of addressing industrial subsidies, transparency gaps, and the need for special and differential treatment (S&DT) that reflects modern economic realities without undermining development goals. The Facilitator concludes by proposing a path for MC14 and beyond, recommending a high-level Ministerial discussion on the WTO's foundational purpose and the endorsement of a structured, post-MC14 work programme with clear checkpoints to maintain political momentum and accountability.

During the General Council meeting, while many WTO Members were critical of certain aspects of the reform agenda and have questions about how the process of negotiations will work at MC14, they supported the texts as the basis for Ministerial discussions. This was not a position shared by the US or India at the General Council meeting. Both raised objections to the level of specificity in the draft work plan, seeking a more general framework rather than structured negotiating tracks. As a result, the Facilitator will present his work plan to ministers in Yaoundé under his own responsibility rather than as a consensus document.

Possible discussion of MFN principle

The Facilitator has also confirmed that ministers will have the opportunity at MC14 to discuss possible changes to the 'most favoured nation' principle, following the US call in December for greater flexibility to differentiate tariff treatment between supplier countries. The EU and UK have offered tentative support for this discussion, but it faces strong opposition from many other Members.

Member positions on WTO reform

In addition to the Facilitator-led process, individual and groups of WTO Members have been putting forward their own positions on reform. These include:

- **Paraguay communication on WTO Reform considerations.** On 3 February, Paraguay submitted a communication ([WT/GC/W/987](#)) covering its perspective on WTO reform from the perspective of a landlocked developing country (LLDC). The communication includes some criticism of the Facilitator-led process while agreeing that WTO Reform needs to be discussed at MC14. It sets out several points under Decision-making at the WTO; Special & Differential Treatment; Reform of the Dispute Settlement Body, Fairness and Institutional matters. Paraguay's communication includes a draft Ministerial Declaration and WTO Reform Work Programme featuring a possible process for 2026-2027.
- **LDC Group on WTO Reform**
 - Gambia, on behalf of the Least Developed Countries (LDC) Group, circulated to WTO Members on 27 February the LDC Group submission on WTO Reform ([WT/GC/W/991](#)) outlining their position on WTO reform across three main pillars: decision-making, development and Special and Differential Treatment (SDT), and fairness.
 - The LDC Group emphasises that reform must maintain the consensus-based decision-making model, which they view as a vital "leveller" for smaller economies. It advocates for a system that respects the Marrakech Agreement's recognition of global economic asymmetries, ensuring that LDCs are not forced to compete with major powers under the same obligations. Furthermore, the group highlights the need for "smooth transition" measures for members graduating from LDC status to ensure continued progress in poverty reduction and trade advancement.

- The submission also addresses systemic fairness, citing the disproportionate market access commitments taken on by acceded LDCs compared to other Members. To improve participation, the LDC Group calls for greater transparency, the removal of punitive measures like technical assistance restrictions due to arrears, and more inclusive agenda-setting that avoids overlapping meetings.
- The **US and EU** have also put forward proposals, which were detailed in earlier briefings.

IV. E-COMMERCE WORK PROGRAMME AND MORATORIUM

Established at the Second Ministerial Conference (MC2) in Geneva in 1998, the WTO Work Programme on Electronic Commerce was created to examine all trade-related issues of global e-commerce, operating alongside a "temporary" moratorium on WTO Members imposing customs duties on electronic transmissions.

MC14 – Current state of play

There are currently two proposals which have been tabled to extend the Moratorium:

1. **US proposal for a permanent moratorium (Job/GC/WPEC/1)**, now co-sponsored by 18 Members.¹ The proposal includes a permanent moratorium on imposing customs duties on electronic transfers on both the transmission and the content of that transmission.
2. **ACP Group proposal (WT/GC/WPEC/W/2)** for a two year extension of the moratorium and a renewed work programme focused on bridging the digital divide, financing digital infrastructure and developing digital regulatory regimes.

A number of Members, including the EU, have indicated that without renewal of the Moratorium, the Work Programme would cease to operate within the WTO. In parallel, we are hearing indications that India may not block an extension, Indonesia has committed to supporting the Moratorium as part of its recent bilateral arrangement with the United States, and South Africa is signalling a more open position.

¹ Argentina, Australia, Chinese Taipei, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Israel, Japan, Korea, Mexico, North Macedonia, Norway, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Singapore and Switzerland.

As a possible compromise, a four-year extension is increasingly being seen as a possible landing zone; however, no outcome is secured until Ministers decide at MC14, which requires a consensus. Sustained engagement by the private sector remains essential through the Conference.

Institutionalising digital trade at the WTO

On 24 February, Australia, Canada, Costa Rica, Israel, Japan, Norway, Peru and Switzerland circulated a [communication](#) at the WTO proposing the creation of a Committee on Digital Trade through a ministerial decision at MC14. The Committee would institutionalise the work of the Work Programme on Electronic Commerce currently spread across the Council for Trade in Services, the Council for Trade in Goods, the TRIPS Council, and the Committee for Trade and Development.

V. E-COMMERCE AGREEMENT

At least 70 of the 72 signatories to the WTO's plurilateral E-Commerce Agreement (ECA) are expected to sign a declaration at MC14 committing to implement the deal on an interim basis. This follows continued obstruction by India of the agreement's incorporation into the WTO's Annex 4, the formal list of ratified plurilateral agreements.

The ECA, whose negotiations concluded in July 2024, establishes baseline global rules for digital trade. Its backers include the EU-27, most CPTPP members, and China, though the United States withdrew from the final phase of negotiations in 2024.

The interim arrangement would be legally binding between signatories and would include some form of dispute settlement. It is designed to expire once the agreement is formally adopted under Annex 4.

The ECA includes a commitment not to impose customs duties on electronic transmissions. Its interim implementation would therefore lock in duty-free digital trade among signatories regardless of whether the broader e-commerce moratorium is renewed at MC14. This does not, however, diminish the importance of securing a permanent moratorium — which would extend the same certainty to all WTO members, including those not party to the ECA.

WTO Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala is expected to publicly support the initiative at the ministerial. The move is likely to intensify the wider debate over WTO decision-making and the role of plurilateral agreements among coalitions of the willing.

VI. INVESTMENT FACILITATION FOR DEVELOPMENT

The Agreement on Investment Facilitation for Development (IFD), a landmark plurilateral initiative supported by over 125 WTO Members (roughly 75% of the membership), failed to be formally incorporated into the WTO legal framework at MC13 in 2024 due to the absence of an explicit consensus.

MC14 state of play

On 19 February 2026, the co-coordinators and co-facilitators of the IFD Agreement - Chile, the Republic of Korea, Cambodia, Cameroon and the European Union – circulated a communication ([WT/GC/W/990](#)) on the Agreement's incorporation into the WTO framework.

South Africa has announced that it will no longer stand in the way of incorporating the IFD Agreement as an Annex 4 agreement. Türkiye continues to withhold its approval, stating that it still has concerns but is open to discussing them. India continues to oppose incorporation.

IFD participating Members have requested that the issue be considered by Ministers at MC14 and are increasingly considering alternative options for giving effect to the agreement if a solution is not found multilaterally. The latest request for incorporation can be found here ([WT/GC/W/927/Rev.4](#)).

VII. AGRICULTURE

Following the official deadlock and eventual abandonment of the Doha Development Round as a single undertaking, the WTO's agriculture negotiations have shifted toward incremental, standalone agreements rather than a comprehensive outcome – much to the concern of many WTO Members.

The Chair of the Committee on Agriculture Special Session, Amb. Ali Sarfaraj Hussain (Pakistan), secured support from a range of Members including the EU, China, India, Brazil, the Cairns Group, Africa Group, ACP Group and G10 (protectionist farm countries – includes Norway, Japan, Switzerland and Taiwan) for the text ([JOB/AG/273/Rev.1](#)). However, the United States and the Cotton-4 (Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali and Chad) objected to the text: the United States due to the lack of “new ideas” and reliance on old negotiating mandates and the Cotton-4 due to the lack of inclusion of cotton issues in the text.

The draft is to be forwarded to the Ministerial Conference for negotiation. Along with his description of the process having led to this draft text and the acknowledgment of the

remaining concerns, the Chair's report will also include guidance on the conduct of Ministerial discussions on agriculture at MC14.

VIII. OTHER POSSIBLE DECISIONS

Small and vulnerable economies

WTO Members [agreed](#) on 17 February on a draft decision for approval at MC14 on improving the integration of small economies into the trading system. Adopted by the Committee on Trade and Development's Dedicated Session on Small Economies, it is the first draft decision submitted for ministerial approval at MC14.

Trade and gender

WTO Ministerial Conferences are also an opportunity for sub-sections of the WTO Membership to signal their priorities outside of the formal multilateral agenda. In this respect, Members of the [Informal Working Group on Trade and Gender](#) held the first of a series of thematic discussions for 2026 on 20 February, with the first meeting focusing on mainstreaming trade and gender in the work of WTO bodies in line with the group's 2025-2026 Work Plan. Members also discussed deliverables to be launched on the sidelines of MC14.

IX. ICC ADVOCACY – NEXT STEPS

ICC remains actively engaged with WTO delegations and partners in Geneva and capitals to support outcomes at MC14 that align with long-standing business priorities. In particular, ICC advocacy continues to focus on the priorities outlined in the [MC14 Call to Action](#):

1. Securing convergence around launching a structured, time-bound work programme on WTO reform; and
2. Extension of the Moratorium on Customs Duties on Electronic Transmissions.

There are encouraging signals on extending the Moratorium on customs duties on electronic transmissions, and discussions on WTO reform continue to evolve — but much remains to be settled at MC14. Positions remain fluid and no outcomes are secured until decisions are taken by Ministers at MC14. The days ahead will therefore be critical.

An updated advocacy pack has been circulated to ICC National Committees to support engagement with national authorities in the final lead-up to MC14.

Commission members are encouraged to reach out to the ICC Global Trade Team at tradecustoms@iccwbo.org with any questions, insights from national engagements, or opportunities for further coordination as we move into the final days ahead of MC14.