



MEDIA RELEASE

YB DATO' SERI MOHAMED AZMIN ALI SUCCESSFULLY LED THE MALAYSIAN DELEGATION AT THE 27th APEC MINISTERS RESPONSIBLE FOR TRADE (MRT) MEETING

The Senior Minister and Minister of International Trade and Industry, YB Dato' Seri Mohamed Azmin Ali successfully led the Malaysian delegation at the virtual 27th APEC Ministers Responsible for Trade (MRT) Meeting held on 5 June 2021. Following last year's success of the 26th MRT Meeting under Malaysia's chairmanship, New Zealand continued the consensus streak when the Ministers issued the APEC MRT Meeting Joint Statement 2021.

Chaired by The Honourable Damien O'Connor, Minister for Trade and Export Growth, New Zealand, the MRT Meeting saw the full participation of the Ministers Responsible for Trade from all 21 APEC Economies, as well as the Director General of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala who shared her insights and aspirations for multilateral solutions in addressing the global challenges, as well as the status of ongoing work at the WTO.

The Joint MRT Statement issued at the end of the Meeting, contained APEC Economies' united pledge in tackling the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic for a strong and expedited economic recovery in the region. Ministers agreed that to achieve this goal, bold actions are needed in three areas, namely, using trade as a tool to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, supporting the rules-based multilateral trading system and shaping future prosperity by strengthening APEC's endeavours in structural reforms, digital economy, implementing the Lima Declaration on the Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP).

Apart from the Joint Statement, Ministers also adopted two Statements, namely, on COVID-19 Vaccines Supply Chains, and Services to Support the Movement of Essential Goods. These two Statements will advance the Declaration on Facilitating the Movement of Essential Goods issued during the 26th MRT Meeting in Malaysia's APEC 2020 host year.

In his intervention, YB Senior Minister highlighted that APEC Economies cannot fight the pandemic alone. He emphasised the need and urgency for APEC to optimise all policy tools and act collectively in ensuring trade continues to flow unimpeded during these trying times. Dato' Seri Azmin Ali also stressed the importance for APEC to guard against vaccine nationalism and stockpiling of vaccines. On the contrary, APEC should do its utmost to facilitate affordable and equitable access to vaccines. Recognising the importance of innovation and digitalisation, Dato' Seri Mohamed Azmin Ali urged officials to expedite the adoption of digitalisation, taking into account the pressing challenges faced by APEC during this pandemic. In this regard, he strongly encouraged APEC Economies to share relevant data and information relating to COVID-19 through the APEC COVID-19 Latest and Immediate Virtual Exchange (APEC COVID-19 LIVE), a digital information-sharing platform launched last year.

During the meeting, the Director General of the WTO, Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala shared her views on the need to ensure equitable access to the COVID-19 vaccines. Acknowledging the work of APEC in facilitating the vaccines supply chains, Dr. Ngozi stressed that "inequality in the access to COVID-19 vaccines is unacceptable" and that "we can't get the vaccines we need without trade". She also called for APEC Ministers to fully support achieving four tangible outcomes out of the Twelfth WTO Ministerial Conference (MC12) scheduled in November 2021, namely the conclusion of the negotiation on fisheries subsidies; meaningful outcome on trade and health; as well as on agriculture and food security; and to provide pathway for the full functioning of the WTO dispute settlement mechanism.

On Malaysia's priorities towards achieving WTO MC12's concrete outcomes, YB Senior Minister remarked "it is imperative that we restore the full-functioning of the Appellate Body to safeguard the predictability and stability of the multilateral trading system." He also underscored the importance of concluding the negotiations on fisheries subsidies which would send a strong signal that the WTO can deliver a multilateral outcome. "Nonetheless, Special and Differential Treatment should remain an integral part in the negotiations. In the case of Malaysia, subsidies are meant for targeted groups with the prime objective to improve the livelihoods of thousands of low-income fishermen, who depend on small-scale fishing for their living," he added.

YB Senior Minister also reiterated the strong call by APEC Leaders last year to treat COVID-19 vaccines as a global public good, and as such, Malaysia looks forward to the commencement of the text-based negotiations on the temporary waiver of certain provisions in the WTO Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement, as these will enhance the affordability of, and accessibility to COVID-19 vaccines.

The fruitful outcome of the 27th APEC MRT Meeting is a positive momentum towards a successful APEC year by New Zealand.

MINISTRY OF INTERNATIONAL TRADE AND INDUSTRY (MITI)

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