

2019 Commonwealth Trade Ministers Meeting Communiqué “Advancing Our Shared Prosperity”

1. We, Commonwealth Trade Ministers, met at Marlborough House on October 10, 2019 to build upon the initiatives agreed by our 53 Heads of Government.
2. We reflected on how the voluntary, non-binding and consensus-based nature of the Commonwealth can be leveraged to address some of the shared challenges facing members. In this regard, we supported the use of the Commonwealth as a platform for the sharing of solutions to policy challenges and for joint action where there is agreement on a shared response.
3. We recognized the unique challenges of small and vulnerable states and the constraints faced by least developed countries, and emphasize that our cooperation will work to ensure they benefit from, and are able to contribute to, our shared prosperity.

Supporting the Multilateral Trading System

4. We exchanged views on the challenges facing the rules-based multilateral trading system and reflected on the role the Commonwealth can play in strengthening the system. As an expression of our commitment to the system, we have issued a separate *Commonwealth Statement on the Multilateral Trading System*, which is annexed to this Communiqué.
5. We further committed to deepening our collaboration to support all members, particularly the most capacity-constrained members, to participate in the multilateral trading system and benefit from trade-related economic growth to help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. We noted the support being provided in this regard by the Commonwealth Small States Office in Geneva, and urged that it be continued.

Deepening Commonwealth Trade and Investment

6. We recognised that with limited size of the domestic market, in many member countries, a strong focus on building productive capacity in support of export development for trade and investment is important for their integration into global trade.

7. We recalled the recognition by Heads of the importance of a long-term vision on trade and investment, and member states' agreement to work towards an appropriate framework and to facilitate business to business contacts. We therefore encourage interested members to constitute a Working Group to take this forward.
8. We welcomed the operationalization of the Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda for Trade and Investment through the formation of multi-sectoral thematic working groups, or clusters, involving the private sector and other international organisations. We commended the bottom up approach to prioritisation, and reiterated the value in this multi-sectoral approach to break down silos to respond to modern policy challenges which are themselves multi-sectoral.
9. We welcomed the submissions by members of their experiences and best practices which have been compiled in a compendium of Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda Case Studies. We welcomed the submissions from the private sector on their experience of good practices by governments as an important innovation. We called on interested members, and other Commonwealth stakeholders, to provide case studies and called on the Secretariat to ensure this information is easily accessible to policymakers throughout the Commonwealth.
10. We endorsed the Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda Action Plan, and tasked our officials to intensify their efforts so that we can have meaningful outcomes. We agreed that this should be a living plan, responding to developments in the global environment and in our cooperation, and we therefore agreed that the plan be periodically updated to take into account these developments, if necessary.

Digital Transformation

11. We emphasized that as we individually address traditional trade policy challenges, we must also prepare our national economies for the Fourth Industrial Revolution that will present new opportunities for, and challenges to, prosperity. In that regard we appreciated the work underway among interested members in the Digital Connectivity Cluster. We welcomed their work on High-Level Principles for Digital Connectivity which provides a useful starting point for deepening collaboration among interested members. We endorsed the creation of a Commonwealth Repository of Digital Policies as a resource for all members to have access to practices from across the Commonwealth.
12. We recognized the importance of infrastructure to digital transformation, and reflected on the role we can play in this regard. We welcomed the initiative, among interested members in the Physical Connectivity Cluster, to examine the role of private sector investment. We take note of the work undertaken so far on principles for sustainable investment in digital infrastructure and tasked interested members to continue refining these principles.
13. We underscored the importance of Smart agriculture and Smart fisheries to the Commonwealth, particularly the role they play in rural job creation. In this regard we welcomed the initiative among interested members in the Supply Side Connectivity Cluster to focus on this sector, and the particular emphasis on the role of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). We recognized the role technology can play in this regard, and we urge interested members to work with

the Secretariat to complete a survey of how members are using technology in the agriculture and fisheries sectors before our Heads meet in June. We took special note of the unique peer to peer collaboration that has taken place among Small Island Developing States to exchange experiences and best practices in the coconut sector and called for further peer to peer exchanges among members from different regions in sectors of common interest.

Creating an Enabling Environment for the Private Sector

14. We affirmed the centrality of the private sector, particularly MSMEs, to job creation and national development. We stressed the particular importance of a supportive policy and regulatory ecosystem for MSMEs and welcomed the approach among interested members in the Regulatory Connectivity Cluster to focus their initial efforts on the fundamentals of the business environment. We urged this cluster to intensify their work in developing voluntary Commonwealth Good Regulatory Practices Principles, drawing on international best practice while making them applicable to the Commonwealth context, and instruct them to finalize the principles by our next meeting.
15. We emphasized the importance of dialogue with the private sector and welcomed the efforts of the Business to Business Cluster to mainstream these views into our collaboration. We welcomed the consultations that have already taken place with the private sector and hereby commission a survey of the Commonwealth private sector on their priority issues for Commonwealth trade and investment. As an expression of the importance we attach to our partnership with the private sector, we agreed to set aside time for direct dialogue with the private sector from across the Commonwealth and across sectors when we next meet.

From Principles to Practice

16. We underscored the importance of practical actions and particularly the value of domestic reform in line with best practices and principles. We called upon members in a position to do so to provide support, using bilateral and Pan-Commonwealth approaches as appropriate, to underpin and boost practical actions by interested members. We called for members to update us on their progress in this regard at our next meeting.
17. We expressed our appreciation to APEC, FAO, ITC, OECD, Pathways for Prosperity Commission on Technology and Inclusive Development, UNCTAD, UNECE, UNESCAP, the United Nations Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation, the World Bank/Global Infrastructure Connectivity Alliance Secretariat, as well as Commonwealth accredited organisations, who have collaborated with the Secretariat to provide technical input into the issues before the clusters, and call on the Secretariat to continue reaching out to organisations where they would add value to the work of members.

Building Trade Competitiveness

18. We expressed appreciation for the demand-driven technical assistance provided by the Secretariat to support the trade competitiveness of developing members in global markets, and underscored the important role that such support plays in

addressing member-identified gaps, particularly for SVEs including small island developing states and least developed countries.

Leveraging Trade and Investment for Inclusive and Sustainable Growth

19. We recognized that while trade and investment are important for growth and development, the benefits and opportunities have to be more widely shared across and within our economies to deliver support for increased trade, and to make it more sustainable. We therefore commit to engaging with all segments of our society to identify appropriate measures to create more inclusive and sustainable growth.
20. Building on the strong desire expressed by our leaders to ensure that gender considerations are mainstreamed into our collaboration, we tasked our officials with undertaking a dedicated initiative to deepen evidence-based understanding of the gender impacts of digital transformation and how to create gender-responsive and inclusive enabling environment for the private sector.
21. Given their critical role in future prosperity, we underscored the importance of ensuring that the 640 million young people in the Commonwealth have the right skills for the future of entrepreneurship and work. We therefore called on the Secretariat, Commonwealth accredited associations and interested members to undertake practical and pragmatic actions to fill this gap.
22. We commended the efforts that have taken place to mainstream the green and blue economy in the work of the Connectivity Agenda. We welcome in particular the efforts that have taken place among the members of the Supply Side Connectivity Cluster and task those involved in the other clusters to focus on this in the months ahead.

Trade and Climate Change

23. Ministers expressed deep concern about the impact of climate change on all members, which significantly and gravely impact their economies and societies. Ministers recognised that SVEs including SIDS are perpetually vulnerable to the devastating effects of natural disasters on livelihoods and trading infrastructure. Ministers called on the Commonwealth members and the international community to support trade measures that help to alleviate these vulnerabilities and challenges and enable reconstruction and improve the resilience of their economies. Ministers instructed the Secretariat to develop a report by CHOGM on how Trade Ministers could help take action.

Towards CHOGM 2020 and Beyond

24. Recognising the importance of trade for sustainable economic growth, and with a view to deepening Commonwealth cooperation in the areas highlighted above, we jointly recommend that our Heads of Government reflect on these issues when they meet in Kigali, Rwanda for the 2020 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting.

25. In this 70th anniversary of the modern Commonwealth, we noted this is the sixth time a Trade Ministerial Meeting has been convened and emphasized the value in our dialogue. We have therefore agreed to meet again before CHOGM 2022.

Commonwealth Statement on the Multilateral Trading System

Marlborough House, London
10 October 2019

1. Commonwealth Trade Ministers were particularly concerned about the risks of protectionism and unilateralism to the global economy and underlined the importance of resisting all forms of protectionism including the proliferation of WTO inconsistent measures that threatens the rules based trading system. They reaffirmed their commitment to free trade in a transparent, inclusive, fair, and open rules-based multilateral trading system with the WTO as its core institution, which takes into account concerns of developing countries and the special circumstances of the developing and the least developed countries and small and vulnerable economies, including Small Island Developing States (SIDS).
2. Ministers noted the efforts that are being undertaken to reform and modernise the WTO, recognising the importance of strengthening and reforming the organisation to improve its functioning so as to promote inclusive and sustainable growth and development. Ministers urged that any reform in the WTO should take into account the views of all members. Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to work constructively together and with other WTO Members on the necessary reform of the organisation with a sense of urgency, including in the lead up to the 12th WTO Ministerial Conference.
3. Ministers noted with concern the imminent threat to the dispute settlement mechanism, a cornerstone of the multilateral rules-based trading system, and agreed that urgent action is necessary to ensure its full functioning. Ministers therefore urged WTO Members to resolve the impasse regarding appointments to the Appellate Body before 11 December 2019.
4. Ministers reiterated their support for finding solutions to the remaining Doha Development Round issues, and recognised the need to address current and future challenges in international trade, including by updating WTO rules, in the interests of all its members. Ministers further recognized the need to enhance developing countries' capacity to participate in and benefit from new forms of trade.
5. Ministers acknowledged the opportunities for growth and development for trade created through e-commerce as well as the challenges posed. Ministers further recognized the need for closing the digital divide amongst Commonwealth and other WTO members.

6. Ministers reaffirmed the importance of the Work Programme on e-commerce at the WTO and noted the ongoing discussion under the Joint Statement Initiative on electronic commerce by some members.
7. They recognized the role the WTO can play in contributing towards achievement of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, and pledged to support conclusion of an agreement on comprehensive and effective disciplines that prohibit certain forms of fisheries subsidies that contribute to overcapacity and overfishing, and eliminate subsidies that contribute to IUU-fishing by the end of 2019. Ministers underscored the importance of the fisheries sector to many Commonwealth members. Furthermore, they recognised that appropriate and effective special and differential treatment for developing country members, in particular for SVEs including SIDS, and least-developed countries should be an integral part of the WTO fisheries subsidies negotiations. Ministers recalled SDG 14.6 and the Decision of Ministers at the 11th Ministerial Conference of the WTO in Buenos Aires in December 2017.
8. Ministers also welcomed ratification of the Trade Facilitation Agreement that has taken place since CHOGM 2018, by Uganda and Cameroon, and encouraged all remaining Commonwealth WTO members to ratify and work towards timely implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement in accordance with their commitments and to consider providing programmes of capacity building and other targeted interventions in developing countries, as agreed by Heads of Government.
9. Ministers expressed deep concern about the impact of climate change on all members, which significantly and gravely impact their economies and societies. Ministers recognised that SVEs including SIDS are perpetually vulnerable to the devastating effects of natural disasters on livelihoods and trading infrastructure. Ministers called on the Commonwealth members, members of the WTO and the international community to support trade measures that help to alleviate these vulnerabilities and challenges and enable reconstruction and improve the resilience of their economies.
10. They welcomed initiatives to strengthen the Commonwealth Small States Office in Geneva through the provision of additional resources and the sharing of technical expertise that enables small and developing states to participate effectively in the multilateral trading system and benefit from trade-related economic growth including through the participation of capital based delegates.