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Dear Members,

Update on Trade Negotiations in September 2023

We are writing to update the Committee on the progress made by our department in trade agreement negotiation rounds with Switzerland and Canada.

UK-Switzerland Trade Negotiations

The second round of negotiations on a UK-Switzerland Enhanced Free Trade Agreement took place from 18 September - 6 October.

During the round, which was virtual, UK officials held discussions with their Swiss counterparts across all negotiation areas. The talks were technical in nature, focusing on trade policy priorities for both countries and in a number of chapters supported by draft treaty text. This has enabled further progress in identifying areas of alignment. Discussions continue to be constructive and collaborative, with both sides agreeing next steps to ensure further progress at Round 3, scheduled for later this year.

These negotiations demonstrate our shared ambition to agree a modern, comprehensive agreement that reflects the current and future UK-Swiss trade relationship.

The UK is working to negotiate an agreement that delivers modern services and investment provisions, while further removing tariff barriers to create mutually beneficial commercially meaningful opportunities for our world class producers and exporters.

UK-Canada Trade Negotiations

UK and Canadian officials undertook the seventh round of negotiations virtually from 11 September-15 September. Discussions were held over 23 policy areas over 53 separate sessions. They included detailed draft treaty text discussions in policy areas such as Financial Services, Investment, Telecoms and Digital. There was also good progress on the Good Regulatory Practice and Gender Equality and Trade Chapters.

Both parties built on the momentum from agreeing in principle UK accession to CPTPP in March 2023. The UK-Canada trade relationship was worth £24.8 billion in the year to Q3 2022. A new and ambitious bilateral deal can strengthen already strong economic links between our two countries, boost the UK economy and bring benefits to UK businesses, and consumers.

Summary

The Government's decision-making process for future trade deals considers various factors, such as the potential economic advantage, global economic patterns, and the feasibility of securing a high-quality agreement that aligns with the UK's national interests. The Government will only ever sign, and present to Parliament, a trade agreement which is in the best interests of the UK and upholds our high environmental, labour, public health, food safety and animal welfare standards, alongside protections for the National Health Service.

We value the important role that the Business and Trade Committee, and the International Agreements Committee in the House of Lords, plays in the scrutiny of the Government's ambitious trade agenda. Our department is committed to being transparent and keeping Parliament appropriately updated on our ambitious trade agenda.

We want to take this opportunity to reiterate the availability of the UK Chief Negotiator for the respective negotiations to brief you in private, should you wish.

We look forward to discussing these agreements with you in more detail in due course.

Yours sincerely,



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