



Department for Business & Trade

Lord Johnson of Lainston CBE
Minister for Investment and Minister for
Regulatory Reform

Department for Business and Trade
Old Admiralty Building
Admiralty Place
Whitehall
London
SW1A 2DY

The Rt Hon Lord Peter Goldsmith KC
Chair, International Agreements Committee
House of Lords
London
SW1A 0PW

T +44 (0) 20 4551 0011
E Johnson.correspondence@businessandtrade.gov.uk
W www.gov.uk/dbt

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Dear Peter,

I am writing to inform you of the UK's approach to the World Trade Organization (WTO) 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13), which will take place in Abu Dhabi, UAE, in the week of 26 February. Trade Ministers from around the world will meet to agree new trading rules and set policy direction for the future of the WTO. The Secretary of State for Business and Trade and the Rt Hon Minister Hands will lead the UK's delegation to MC13 with the aim of securing outcomes which deliver for businesses and consumers in the UK and globally, and which strengthen the rules-based multilateral trading system. The UK is a key player at the WTO and our visible and activist leadership at MC13 will further cement our position as an influential independent trading nation, building on our successes at MC12 in June 2022.

MC13 takes place at a time of heightened geopolitical tensions, acute global challenges such as food insecurity and climate change, and a deepening divide between Members over the benefits afforded by the rules-based international trading system. In a difficult geopolitical environment, MC13 offers the opportunity for Members discuss issues which will help the WTO to respond to global crises and address long-term global trade challenges, while modernising global trade rules which benefit all Members. It is important the UK uses the opportunity to work with other Members to demonstrate our commitment to free and fair trade.

At the Conference I look forward to being able to celebrate the recent agreement of important initiatives such as the conclusion of negotiations on the Investment Facilitation for Development Joint Initiative, which we hope to see incorporated into the WTO framework at MC13 and which will facilitate investment opportunities for UK businesses in developing economies. We will also welcome agreement to support Least Developed Countries with integration into the WTO by extending flexibilities as they transition their economies away from LDC status. Furthermore, at MC13, the UK and other Members will approve the accession of Comoros and Timor Leste and confirm their membership to the WTO. With two LDCs acceding to the Organization, the UK welcomes the expansion of the multilateral trading system, the harmonisation of global standards and the further integration of two nations into the global economy.

Beyond these already significant steps forward, my ambition for MC13 is to make incremental improvements to strengthen and reform the WTO whilst defending and promoting rules that foster prosperity for the UK and for our trading partners globally. As such, our objectives are to:

- a) **Protect the integrity of the rules-based trading system** by making progress towards a fully functioning dispute settlement system by 2024; and renewing the e-commerce moratorium, which has prevented the imposition of customs duties on electronic transmissions since 1998.
- b) **Pursue foreign, development and environment policy interests** by securing an outcome in phase two of the Fisheries Subsidies Agreement, taking action on export restrictions as a means of addressing food insecurity, and supporting further measures to ensure a smooth transition when countries graduate from Least Developed Country status.
- c) **Set direction for the future of the global trading order** through ongoing work on WTO reform and providing direction for policy discussions on contemporary trade policy challenges including the relationship between trade and industrial policy and the environment.

MC13 is an opportunity for the UK to demonstrate its commitment to the multilateral trading system and I will leverage every opportunity at the Conference to drive outcomes which reflect our priorities and protect our interests.

I will write to you following MC13 to update you on outcomes.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'D. Johnson', with a horizontal line underneath it.

Lord Johnson of Lainston CBE
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