



Department for Business & Trade

Rt Hon Peter Kyle MP
Secretary of State for the Department for
Business & Trade
President of the Board of Trade
Old Admiralty Building
Admiralty Place
London
SW1A 2DY
United Kingdom

The Rt Hon Liam Byrne MP
Chair, Business and Trade Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

T: +44 (0) 020 4551 0011
E: kyle.correspondence@businessandtrade.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/dbt

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Dear Liam,

UK Approach to the World Trade Organization 14th Ministerial Conference

I am writing to confirm the UK's approach to the World Trade Organization (WTO) 14th Ministerial Conference (MC14) taking place in Yaoundé, Cameroon from 26 to 29 March 2026. Ministerial Conferences are the highest decision-making body in the WTO and take place every two years, with Trade Ministers from the WTO's 166 Members meeting to discuss issues which will help the WTO to address long-term global trade challenges and modernise global trade rules benefiting all Members. This letter follows the briefing that Minister Bryant provided to this Committee on WTO Reform on 9 March 2026.

MC14 is taking place at a critical juncture for the WTO and the Multilateral Trading System. Heightened geopolitical polarisation and fundamental tensions within the WTO itself have exacerbated the stability of the system and cast into doubt the organisation's ability to remain relevant in a rapidly changing international landscape.

Against this backdrop of global fragmentation, key flashpoints of contention include the incompatibility of market and non-market economies, impacts of large economies claiming Special and Differential Treatment (SDT), Members blocking progress and outcomes, and lack of a fully functioning Dispute Settlement System.

As a nation with high trade intensity, the UK has a strong interest in an international rules-based system that enables open and fair trade while curbing long-term imbalances and market-distorting practices. That is why the UK has been at the forefront of efforts to reform the WTO. Since the last conference (MC13) held in Abu Dhabi in early 2024, we have:

- Published our Trade Strategy (June 2025) which clearly sets out the UK's commitment to WTO reform to ensure it remains fit for purpose and delivers for the UK's domestic interests;
- Hosted a Wilton Park Conference on WTO reform (October 2025) to solidify our role as a major convening power on this topic;
- Published the Prime Minister's Five-Point plan for growth to G20 leaders (November 2025) which emphasised the UK's commitment to the rules-based international system; and

- Published a communication with our vision for WTO reform in March 2026. This communication sets out our diagnosis of the long-term issues affecting the WTO and our vision for a more relevant, flexible and accessible system that keeps pace with the modern global economy, maintains close engagement with business and industry, and drives global growth and development for all. It will be the basis of our approach on reform at the WTO.

Due to the complexity of the issues facing the WTO, I do not expect that MC14 itself will deliver substantive WTO reform. Instead, it should set the WTO up to agree this reform by MC15. The UK also has further objectives for MC14 beyond WTO reform. I will attend MC14 as head of the UK's delegation with the aim of securing the following objectives:

- a) **Use MC14 to set political direction and a clear path for structured discussions on WTO reform to deliver substantive change by MC15 in 2028**, retaining elements of the framework that work well and modernising those that do not. Through seeking Ministerial commitment to urgently advance substantive work on reform, we will strive to make the WTO:
 - a. **more relevant**: by creating a level playing field and meeting the challenges of today by addressing issues such as digital, environment and services. Restoring a fully functioning dispute settlement system is also important to ensure accountability;
 - b. **more flexible**: by exploring new tools to help reach consensus-based decisions and preventing the unjustifiable blocking of the plurilateral agenda; and
 - c. **more accessible**: building on initiatives to continue increasing transparency and inclusivity throughout WTO processes and meetings and a more targeted case-by-case, agreement by agreement approach to Special and Differential Treatment (SDT), with more Members voluntarily opting out of SDT to recognise the complex nature of national economies in today's world.
- b) **Progress the plurilateral agenda at the WTO at MC14** by implementing of the Agreements on E-Commerce and Investment Facilitation for Development to start realising the benefits of these agreements and show the WTO can work in new ways.
- c) **Maintain the ban on customs duties on electronic commerce (e.g. software, video streaming)** currently assured by the E-Commerce moratorium to keep the costs of digital trade down.
- d) **Continue supporting wider development work in line with broader UK objectives**, including a successful launch of the third phase of the Enhanced Integrated Framework – the only multilateral fund dedicated to supporting Least Developed Country trade.

Due to the polarisation of views on the topics above, there is a real possibility that the UK will have to consider what is most feasible to achieve as an outcome for MC14. I will be prepared to make trade-offs, whilst maintaining a focus on the UK priorities of WTO reform. My officials will represent the UK's interests in all key negotiations and leverage every opportunity at the conference to drive outcomes which reflect our priorities and protect our interests.

As the largest meeting of trade ministers from around the world, MC14 also provides a valuable opportunity for me to meet bilaterally with counterparts to raise issues of key interest to the UK and our businesses. I look forward to working closely with our key international partners as we approach the conference to deepen and further areas of agreement.

However, in the current context and with pre-existing divides at the WTO, we will need to be strategic about where we expend UK capital and energy, and how we work with partners to deliver outcomes in our shared interests.

In summary, I will endeavour to use MC14 to achieve outcomes that reset the organisation, agree modalities for negotiation, and launch discussions on reform to deliver change by MC15 whilst defending and promoting the rules that foster prosperity for the UK. I will write to you following MC14 with an update on outcomes and progress on the negotiation files.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Peter J. Kyle', with a stylized flourish at the end.

RT HON PETER KYLE MP

Secretary of State for Business and Trade
President of the Board of Trade