Statement by

Mr. Roberto Azevêdo
Director-General

World Trade Organization
Global trade is experiencing a modest recovery in 2017. WTO forecasts point to growth of 3.6% in 2017. Import demand has picked up in the largest traders (China, the United States and the European Union) helping spur trade growth globally given their location in global supply chains.

Trade played a crucial role in achieving, ahead of schedule, the MDG goal of reducing extreme poverty by half, and it will play an equally important role in delivering the Sustainable Development Goals. Strong trade growth will therefore be key.

The process of opening up to trade and adopting global rules has been important in reducing poverty and boosting development. WTO rules have helped to create the predictable environment that is conducive to growth (this is particularly visible in the countries that have recently acceded to WTO). In addition, trade disputes between countries are settled on the basis of the rule of law, in an open and transparent manner. This has helped to create a global trading system that is stable and inclusive.

While substantial progress has been made, there are still significant challenges that need to be met. Many countries still fall short of their development goals. There is still a lot to gain from deeper economic integration. Tariffs in key sectors for developing countries remain high, as do non-tariff barriers. A number of development-focused outcomes were delivered at the WTO Ministerial Conferences in Bali in 2013 and Nairobi in 2015. These include the Trade Facilitation Agreement, the removal of export subsidies in agriculture, and a range of decisions in favour of least-developed countries.

WTO members are looking to make further progress at the Ministerial Conference in Buenos Aires in December this year in order to make the global trading system even more inclusive. Continued support for least-developed countries to engage more in the trading system and to benefit more from it will be essential. Another important element is enhancing the participation of smaller companies in the trading system. Such companies are vital to every economy but they face particular challenges as they seek trading opportunities, including difficulty in obtaining trade finance. The WTO is working with the World Bank, IFC and other partners to improve trade finance provision for developing countries.

The WTO commends the efforts that the World Bank Group has taken in supporting trade related infrastructure through the WTO Aid for Trade initiative. We held a very successful review of this initiative in July this year. It highlighted the important role that Aid for Trade plays, when it goes hand-in-hand with market access opening, in alleviating poverty and fostering trade-led development. One particular theme that emerged from the Review is that of trade and economic empowerment, including the actions that can be taken to stimulate connectivity and participation in e-commerce. Finally, we welcome the steps that the World Bank governors and senior management have taken to support implementation of the WTO's Trade Facilitation Agreement through the Trade Facilitation Support Programme.
We urge ministers to continue to give a high priority to the better integration of developing countries into the multilateral trading system. Together, the World Bank and the WTO can continue to advance their shared goals of raising living standards and ensuring a brighter future for the world's poor.