

PRESS RELEASE

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WTO HIGH-LEVEL SYMPOSIA ON TRADE AND ENVIRONMENT AND TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT

The World Trade Organization will hold two high-level symposia this month in Geneva. The symposia, to be held from 15 through 18 March, will be an open dialogue on issues concerning trade and environment and trade and development. The objective of the meetings, which will each last two days, is to increase awareness and understanding of government positions and NGO concerns by providing participants with an opportunity to improve their understanding of how the WTO works and how the organization is addressing the issues of trade and environment and trade and development.

The symposia will be the first time that representatives from non-governmental organizations will be invited to exchange views on both subjects with senior government officials from WTO member and observer governments and with high-level representatives from international organizations.

In addition to NGO representatives, other participants include senior government officials, academics and officials from the inter-governmental agencies directly involved in environment and development issues.

Key note addresses during the Trade and Environment Symposium will be given by Sir Leon Brittan, Vice-President of the European Commission, by Mr. Klaus Topfer, Executive Director of the UN Environmental Programme and by Mr. Ian Johnson, Vice-President for the Environment and Socially Sustainable Development at the World Bank.

Key note speakers for the Symposium on Trade and Development are Mr. Rubens Ricupero, Secretary General of UNCTAD, Mr. F. Paolo Fulci, President of ECOSOC, Mr. Masood Ahmed, Vice President, Head of Poverty Reduction & Economic Management Network at the World Bank, Mr. Shigemitsu Sugisaki, Deputy Managing Director, Policy Development & Review Division at the IMF, and Professor T. N. Srinivasan of Yale University.

The high-level symposium on trade and environment will be held on 15 and 16 March 1999. WTO Director-General Mr. Renato Ruggiero recalled that the idea of such a meeting had been raised by Sir Leon and by US President Bill Clinton at the 50th anniversary commemoration of the multilateral trading system in May 1998. The high-level symposium on trade and development, strongly supported by Egypt, Pakistan and many other developing and advanced economies, will be held on 17 and 18 March 1999. Both meetings will take place at the WTO and will be chaired by Mr. Ruggiero.

The two symposia represent another step forward in the WTO's dialogue with civil society. In addition to his regular meetings with NGOs, Mr. Ruggiero said the organization has taken important measures to advance WTO relations with civil society, including:

- scheduling regular briefings on WTO activities for NGO representatives in Geneva;
- establishing a NGO section on the WTO's website;
- making NGO documents available to WTO member governments;
- proposing the accelerated de-restriction of almost all WTO documents;
- discussing initiatives for earlier publication of dispute settlement panel reports; and
- proposing the creation of an informal structure to establish regular dialogues with civil society.

Mr. Ruggiero recalled that all WTO's decisions must be agreed by consensus and ratified by every national parliament of each WTO member. He said this guarantees a maximum amount of democracy and transparency in international trade rules.

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