

WTO SECRETARIAT ACTIVITIES WITH NGOS

Article V:2 of the Marrakesh Agreement calls upon the General Council to "make appropriate arrangements for consultation and cooperation with non-governmental organizations concerned with matters related to those of the WTO."¹ In accordance with this mandate, the Secretariat was given the task by the General Council in the 1996 Guidelines For Arrangements on Relations With Non-Governmental Organizations of playing "a more active role in its direct contacts with NGOs ... [T]his interaction ... should be developed through various means such as *inter alia* the organization on an *ad hoc* basis of symposia on specific WTO-related issues, informal arrangements to receive the information NGOs may wish to make available for consultation by interested delegations and the continuation of past practice of responding to requests for general information and briefings about the WTO."²

In pursuit of the objectives set out in the 1996 Guidelines, the Secretariat has been giving consideration to activities that might be carried out with NGOs in the months leading up to the Fourth Ministerial Conference and also at the Doha meeting itself. As in the past, the basic objective of this programme of activities is to facilitate and encourage substantive and responsible discussion with NGOs on issues falling within the WTO's mandate.

Specific activities between now and the 4th Ministerial Conference

I. NGO dialogues and briefings at the WTO

- Small-scale NGO lunchtime dialogues:

NGO representatives who have published trade-related studies or reports on issues falling within the WTO's mandate may be invited to the Centre William Rappard for an informal discussion of their work with interested delegations and secretariat officials. The selection would be made by the Secretariat but Members are encouraged to submit names of NGOs which could be invited.

- Small-scale issue-driven, "open dialogue" discussions:

Specific informal dialogues will be organized on issues of concern to NGOs that fall within the WTO mandate, for participants from NGOs, Members, and Secretariat. These events would be kept relatively small in order to facilitate substantive discussion. Where possible, they could take place back-to-back with WTO meetings on issues of concern to NGOs. In order to ensure the presence of non-Geneva-based NGOs, in particular from developing countries, dialogues could also be organized around meetings of other international bodies in Geneva which attract NGOs.

¹ Article V.2 of the Marrakesh Agreement establishing the WTO.

² Paragraph 4 of the Guidelines For Arrangements on Relations With Non-Governmental Organizations adopted on 18 July 1996 (WT/L/162, 23 July 1996)

- NGO briefings:

Regular NGO briefings will be organized after WTO meetings of interest to NGOs, including General Council sessions on preparations for Qatar.

II. *Participation of NGOs in technical seminars organized by the WTO Secretariat in Geneva:*

Opportunities will be explored to allow interested NGO representatives to attend technical seminars organized for Members by the Secretariat (e.g. the recent Symposium on Tourism Services).

III. *Organization of stand-alone workshops by the WTO Secretariat*

Consideration is being given to the possibility of organizing one or more stand-alone workshops covering issues of interest to NGOs falling within the WTO's mandate. Such workshops could be organized both regionally and in Geneva and should wherever possible complement national activities by the Members. Any workshops organized in Geneva would most likely be larger events than those planned regionally. Workshops of this nature would, in accordance with past practice, be organized under the Secretariat's own responsibility.

NGO-focused website outreach

The Secretariat will continue to use its website to disseminate information about the WTO, announce events and activities, engage in discussion, and generally increase transparency and raise the profile of our NGO-related activities. Some activities that are planned or currently underway on the website include:

- Chatrooms: An interactive electronic discussion forum was established two months ago. The forum provides for active and self-initiated discussions between interested individuals and organizations. In order to focus the discussion further, theme-specific fora of defined duration are being planned by the WTO Secretariat. Where possible, this will be done in cooperation with other international organizations and individual (academic) experts.
- NGO position papers: NGO position papers on WTO-related activities will continue to be published on the WTO website. In the run-up to Qatar, the number of position papers is likely to grow. Increasing numbers of position papers are already made available in downloadable format. In addition, the papers will be divided by subject for ease of reference.
- "NGOs in the news": The secretariat is exploring the possibility of using the NGO page on its website to post temporarily NGO positions and statements on issues within the WTO's mandate. These should address current issues.
- NGO bulletin: The Secretariat publishes a monthly bulletin containing information about WTO and WTO Secretariat activities and events of interest to NGOs.
- Use of website in preparations for Doha: The website will serve as a vital tool for disseminating information about the logistical arrangements for NGOs attending the 4th Ministerial Conference and for NGO accreditation procedures.

Activities involving NGOs at Doha

The WTO Secretariat will be working further on a programme of activities for NGOs during the Doha meeting. This will be done in consultation with interested Members and NGOs. Some of the activities under consideration include the following:

I. General Daily NGO briefings

The WTO Secretariat would brief registered NGOs once or twice a day about the proceedings of the Ministerial. Arrangements would also be made for Ministers or officials of Members who wish to brief NGOs.

II. Issue-specific NGO briefings

Focused, issue-specific briefings would also be provided for registered NGOs, involving the relevant WTO Secretariat Directors and/or staff. The subject-matter of such briefings would be determined by the state of play at the Ministerial Meeting and the interests expressed by NGOs.

III. Workshops organized by the WTO Secretariat

Workshops would be organized by the WTO Secretariat on issues of interest to NGOs. These events would take place at the NGO Centre and would be open to all participants at the WTO Ministerial.
