

PRESS RELEASE

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ACCESSIONS: LEAST-DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

Director-General Supachai welcomes agreement streamlining LDC membership

Member governments today (2 December 2002) approved guidelines which should facilitate the integration of the world's poorest countries into the global economy by streamlining their accession procedures into the World Trade Organization.

Director-General Dr. Supachai Panitchpakdi applauded the decision taken today by WTO Members in the Sub-Committee on least-developed countries to adopt guidelines for LDCs' accessions to the WTO. The guidelines will be formally submitted next week to the WTO General Council, where governments are expected to approve them.

"The agreed guidelines constitute a significant milestone and a vital contribution to the efforts to integrate the LDCs into the multilateral trading system. The decision on the guidelines represents a major breakthrough and substantively contributes to facilitating the accession of LDCs to the WTO."

The agreed text identifies guidelines for LDCs' accessions in 4 areas: market access; WTO rules; process; and trade-related technical assistance and capacity building. The guidelines were negotiated in accordance with the mandate given to negotiators by trade ministers at the WTO's Doha Ministerial Conference in November 2001. When ministers in Doha launched the global trade negotiations known as the Doha Development Agenda, they underscored as a principle objective of those negotiations, the integration of the LDCs into the multilateral trading system and the global economy. The adoption of the guidelines also builds on the WTO Work Programme for the LDCs agreed on 12 February, shortly after Doha.

Director-General Supachai thanked all WTO Members for their flexibility in the consultations, which was instrumental to leading to the agreement on the guidelines. He said the commitment shown on negotiating this framework must be matched with thorough implementation on all sides. The Director-General commended Ambassador Johan Molander of Sweden who chaired the negotiations in the Sub-Committee on LDCs which resulted in this agreement.

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