



Inter-Parliamentary Union
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Office of the
Secretary General

Geneva, 15 May 2015

Parliamentary session within the framework of the WTO Public Forum 2015

Geneva, WTO Headquarters, Room S3, 30 September 2015

Dear Madam President,
Dear Mr. President,

Over recent years, the World Trade Organization (WTO) has established a tradition of holding annual public events where participants from government, parliament, civil society, the business sector, academia and the media jointly reflect upon the functioning of the multilateral trading system and analyse the state of advancement of the Doha Development Agenda. The annual **WTO Public Forum** is now a significant feature of the international calendar.

It has likewise become a tradition to hold special parliamentary sessions within the overall organizational framework provided by WTO Public Forums. Such sessions are geared towards the specific interests of members of parliament specializing in international trade and are closely linked with the process known as the *Parliamentary Conference on the WTO*, which is driven by the synergies of the IPU and the European Parliament and constitutes a de facto parliamentary dimension of this inter-governmental organization.

This year's WTO Public Forum will be held from 30 September to 2 October, on WTO premises in Geneva (Centre William Rappard), under the overall theme **Trade Works**. The Forum's programme is exceptionally rich and includes over 40 events, including a parliamentary session, which will take place on **Wednesday, 30 September 2015, from 4 to 5.30 p.m., in room S3**.

The title of the parliamentary session is **Reducing trade costs: why speedy legislative action on the Trade Facilitation Agreement is of paramount importance**. The Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), commonly perceived as the most important outcome of the 9th WTO Ministerial Conference in Bali, is aimed at boosting global trade by expediting the movement, release and clearance of goods. It is expected to benefit the global economy by up to \$ 1 trillion per year. Its entry into force requires domestic ratification by two-thirds of WTO Members. Parliaments play a key role in this regard. Their swift action to ratify the TFA is pivotal for allowing all countries - particularly the least developed ones - to see the promised gains from growing trade and increasing foreign direct investment. The holding of a special parliamentary event focused on the TFA during the WTO Public Forum should help legislators better understand the underlying issues.

The importance of parliamentary action on the TFA was also underlined in the outcome document of the recently held annual session of the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO (Geneva, 15-16 February 2015), which urged parliaments of WTO Member States to ratify the Agreement as soon as possible. At the time, the WTO Secretariat prepared a succinct information note outlining relevant facts and figures about the TFA. You will find a copy of the note enclosed with this letter. Please consider bringing it to the attention of members of your Parliament who may take part in the forthcoming WTO Public Forum. Explanations and arguments contained in the note may also prove to be useful for the debate in relevant standing committees and other bodies in your Parliament that deal with questions of international trade and development and will therefore be involved in the TFA ratification process.

The parliamentary session to be held within the WTO Forum on 30 September is open to all participants duly accredited to the Forum, subject to the limits of the room's seating capacity. Interpretation into English, French and Spanish will be provided by the WTO Secretariat. A detailed programme of the session will be posted shortly on the IPU website at <http://www.ipu.org/splz-e/wto-forum15.htm>.

In conformity with WTO practice, all participants in the Public Forum are responsible for their own visa, travel arrangements and accommodation in Geneva. Online registrations for the Public Forum will be open in June. Participants are required to register, by **20 September 2015** at the latest, using the WTO website (https://www.wto.org/english/forums_e/public_forum15_e/public_forum15_e.htm). Please note that registration is handled by the WTO Secretariat and that no on-the-spot registration is possible.

I wish to make it very clear that the IPU is not dealing with any logistical matters relating to the WTO Public Forum and is not in a position to help your delegates with accommodation and other practical arrangements in Geneva, which remain the sole responsibility of each of the WTO Forum's participant.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Martin Chungong', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Martin Chungong
IPU Secretary General