

Summary Report

10th Meeting of South Asian Geneva Mission Delegates

CUTS Geneva Resource Centre Conference Room, 14 September, 2011

1. The 10th informal quarterly meeting of the Geneva Missions delegates of South Asian countries was held at CUTS GRC at lunch time on 14th September 2011. All eight South Asian Missions in Geneva were invited. Participants from Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and Pakistan attended the meeting.
2. The first discussion item for this meeting related to the upcoming 8th WTO Ministerial Conference which is to be held in Geneva from 15-17 December 2011. The second item related to a short briefing on CUTS Centre for International Trade, Economics and Environment (CUTS CITEE) on-going projects and activities in South Asian countries.

Main Points from the Discussion

3. It has been noted that the content of Plan B for Doha Round is still not clear, and that current observations give the impression that negotiators are moving beyond the Ministerial Conference in December with the plan to rebalance and regenerate the WTO system.
4. The stagnation of current negotiations is partly due to the fact that some countries do not gain anything whether it is under LDC or LDC+ issues.
5. The two issues of critical importance to LDCs that need to be included in the fast track under Plan B, the Services Waiver and Duty Free Quota Free Market Access (DFQF), as mentioned in the last meeting, have been developed through informal consultations but developments are still not concrete enough. DFQF is seen to be more bi- than multilateral.
6. For South Asian countries, two scenarios are conceivable with regard to further negotiations within the Doha Round. The first scenario includes the achievement of very little and some LDC+ issues. The other scenario is the retention of the status quo.

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7. The issues discussed today will probably not be discussed at the Ministerial Meeting in December, and even if they will be put on the agenda, a decision in their respect will not be taken by the Ministers.
8. The regrouping of countries within the group of developing countries has been discussed and rejected earlier. Inclusion of differentiated treatment for LDCs, SVEs, Preference-Receiving Countries, and Recently Acceded Members in various draft modalities texts raises important questions for the future of this debate.
9. Current debate about the re-categorization of groups within the developing countries group is similar to the debate on Special and Differential Treatment a few years ago, where it was argued that the mandate was only to discuss the implementation of S&D Treatment, and not which group of countries is to receive S&D Treatment and to what amount. A question has been raised on whether the regrouping of countries is a general shifting within the WTO system, or if the move would only concern the Doha Round issues.
10. Attention has been called upon the implications of rebalancing the powers of negotiating countries in the Doha Round. A new point on the agenda could be opened by the rebalancing of powers, which consequently would lead to discussions on the mandate the Doha Round is currently resting on. Although this is presented by some as a solution to the ongoing halt of negotiations, it is also a long process and the ongoing negotiations would have to start from square one. Additionally, rearranging the Doha Mandate also means rearranging the WTO multilateral system.
11. CUTS also presented the programmes currently being undertaken by CUTS Centre for International Trade, Economics and Environment (CUTS CITEE) in South Asian countries. In its future projects, CUTS is planning on including all 8 South Asian countries in the projects it undertakes where possible.

Next meeting

12. In keeping up with the quarterly meeting schedule, it was agreed to hold the next Informal Forum Meeting in early December. CUTS GRC would communicate a convenient date to the delegates. If necessary, the next meeting can also take place on a shorter notice.
13. CUTS GRC has offered to produce a briefing paper for the 8th Ministerial Conference if requested by the participants.