

# WTO General Council March 2026: UK Statement

13.3.2026 - | Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs

## UK Statement at the World Trade Organization's General Council in Geneva.

### *Day 3*

#### ***Agenda item 7 - Paraguay paper on reform***

Thanks very much, Chair. We welcome members making contributions to the reform discussion and encourage more to come forward with their ideas, as the UK has done. However, we are cautious about diverging too far from the hard work we have all done led by the reform facilitator. It is this work that gives us the best opportunity to achieve a meaningful reform outcome at MC14. An outcome without any substance would take us backwards significantly and would not be where ministers will expect us to come out at the conference. We've had two Ministerials with instructions to deliver WTO reform, Ministers will expect us to do more than come up with a process. Thank you.

#### ***Agenda item 8 - UK paper on reform***

Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you to all the members that have reached out to us to engage on the UK's reform paper since its publication. Recognising that we are running significantly overtime and we have already discussed reform quite a lot, we don't want to take up too much time. But we did want to use the opportunity of the General Council to share a bit more information on why the UK has come forward with a paper on WTO reform and what the paper actually contains. So firstly on the why: the WTO and the rules-based system it represents has a critical role in providing stability and certainty for business. It delivers on average a 15% tariff equivalent value to the average member in this room. That 15% racks up every time a product crosses a border. While there are significant benefits, it's clear there are also serious problems with the WTO and how members are applying rules which is creating serious costs. It's clear we are at a tipping point for the WTO, where those costs might start to outweigh the benefits, and for some members we might have already reached that point. So, the WTO is at a pivotal moment, the status quo is unsustainable and we risk moving backwards towards a power-based system. So, we need a new vision with rules that are fit for purpose and enforced. We really welcome having so many different WTO proposals coming forward from such a variety of members and we very much see our paper as a contribution to this. So, turning to the substance of the paper, it sets out a vision for a system that is more relevant, more flexible and more accessible. By more relevant, we mean a system that has the tools to manage the negative externalities that are created by diverse economic models and a system that deals with contemporary issues like digital trade, environment and services, with a fully functioning dispute settlement system. By more flexible, we mean that it needs the tools to help us reach consensus-based decisions and to move forward on plurilateral agreements. And by more accessible, we mean a WTO that has become more open: more open to business and more open to stakeholders, or we risk becoming completely disconnected from the real world. We also need it to be more accessible by taking a case-by-case, agreement-by-agreement approach to Special and Differential Treatment (SDT), with more members coming forward to voluntary opt out of SDT and look at issues on agreement-by-agreement basis. This is very much the headlines of our paper. As we have said, for us having a clear outcome on reform is a priority for MC14 and we really want to thank the facilitator and all the members for their hard work towards this. We hope that our paper gives a sense of the areas the UK would like to see progress as the reform discussion moves forward following MC 14

and we would welcome further conversations with members on our paper. Our door is always open. Thank you.

***Agenda item 9 - China paper on reform***

Thank you, Chair. We just wanted to come in briefly to thank the delegation from China for their contribution to this conversation. As we just said, we think it is really positive that we now have so many contributions from such a variety of the membership all outlining their visions for the WTO. This really shows the urgency we all feel and the level of commitments that members have to reform this organisation. And it really says to us why we need to make sure we have a clear statement and work plan off the back of the facilitators' work to be agreed at MC14, so we can get into this conversation, so that we can come back in April, and look at all of these contributions, look at all of the ideas in them and make sure that we take it forward to make recommendations for change after MC15.

Thank you.

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