



**Ministerial Conference
Thirteenth Session
Abu Dhabi, 26 February-2 March 2024**

**STRENGTHENING REGULATORY COOPERATION
TO REDUCE TECHNICAL BARRIERS TO TRADE**

MINISTERIAL DECLARATION

Adopted on 2 March 2024

1. We acknowledge that the work of the WTO Committee on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT Committee) has been instrumental in advancing the implementation of the Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT Agreement) and keeping the TBT Agreement dynamic since 1995 particularly through the Triennial Review process. In this regard, we recognize the good practices developed by the TBT Committee in the areas of transparency and notifications, managing trade interests (e.g. specific trade concerns), decisions and recommendations (e.g. the decision of the Committee on Principles for the Development of International Standards¹), information exchange (e.g. thematic sessions) and efficient use of digital tools (e.g. ePing; eAgenda).

2. We reaffirm that the TBT Agreement remains relevant to modern global trade challenges and emerging policy concerns, including measures taken to address climate change, the digital economy and global health pandemics. The TBT Agreement provides a multilateral framework for regulatory cooperation that is essential to avoid and reduce unnecessary barriers to trade. We note, for example, that close regulatory cooperation among Members was fundamental in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic by facilitating trade through the reduction or suspension of unnecessary regulatory barriers, use of international standards or temporary recognition of multiple standards, and decreasing unnecessary costs.

3. We also recognize the important role of the Committee discussing regulatory cooperation in promoting good regulatory practices for both developed and developing Members.

4. We recall that the TBT Committee was established with the explicit mandate of affording Members the opportunity to consult on any matters relating to the operation of the TBT Agreement and the furtherance of its objectives.² In this regard, we seek to promote the Committee's role in supporting transparency, regulatory cooperation and collaboration between Members within the scope of this Agreement.

5. In light of the above, the Ministerial Conference:

- a. *Affirms* that regulatory cooperation helps to avoid and reduce unnecessary barriers to trade. Cooperation assists Members in meeting cross border and global challenges, and builds confidence between trading partners through mutual understanding and dialogue. This contributes to the development of effective and efficient technical regulations and avoids regulatory differences and unnecessary divergence;
- b. *Notes* that cooperation on emerging issues – particularly in the context of international standards development and adoption – provides an opportunity to promote regulatory convergence where appropriate;

¹ [G/TBT/9](#), 13 November 2000, para. 20 and Annex 4.

² Article 13.1 of the TBT Agreement.

- c. *Encourages* Members to engage early in exchange of comments on draft regulations and signal willingness to work together in order to identify and mitigate potential regulatory differences or more trade restrictive than necessary obstacles to trade before regulatory changes are finalised;
 - d. *Urges* the Committee to promote its Member-driven work on immediate and emerging regulatory challenges, including but not limited to the areas of climate change, sustainable development, digital economy, and human health, and *stresses* the importance of promoting dialogue between Members, including among competent authorities and bodies;
 - e. *Underlines* the importance of transparency as a key building block for constructive engagement and encourages making information on all related technical regulations/conformity assessment procedures publicly available, continued refinement of related Committee notifications and use of digital tools to improve the global trading and business environment;
 - f. *Encourages* Members, as a means of enhancing the predictability of the business environment and access to regulatory information, to implement the TBT Committee recommendation on notification formats and notification of adopted final text of measures³;
 - g. *Promotes* the further development, enhancement and adoption of digital tools, including ePing and eAgenda, for early engagement on TBT matters and deliver training on how to use these which will support the proper functioning of the TBT Agreement;
 - h. *Stresses* the importance of technical assistance and capacity building to address challenges facing developing Members, especially in the area of transparency and quality infrastructure; and,
 - i. *Promotes* international recognition arrangements for accreditation, which can facilitate the acceptance of conformity assessment procedures.
6. The Ministerial Conference supports the TBT Committee advancing work on these points in the context of the Tenth Triennial Review of the TBT Agreement based on proposals from Members (e.g. regular meetings, thematic sessions, informal meetings and working groups as necessary), and reporting to the Council for Trade in Goods with recommendations or findings, as appropriate.
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³ [G/TBT/1/Rev.15](#), page 43.