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**OPENING REMARKS BY MR LEE YI SHYAN
MINISTER OF STATE FOR TRADE & INDUSTRY
AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
AT THE POLICY DIALOGUE ON DOHA ISSUES AND THE
CONTEMPORARY TRADE AGENDA
ON WEDNESDAY, 5 OCTOBER 2011, AT 0920 HRS
AT GRAND COPTHORNE WATERFRONT HOTEL**

Ladies and Gentlemen

1. It gives me great pleasure today to welcome all of you to Singapore for the first Policy Dialogue on Doha Issues and the Contemporary Trade Agenda. We are very honoured to host this inaugural Dialogue which brings together senior officials from the WTO Secretariat, senior trade officials from the region and trade experts.

Partnering the WTO Secretariat

2. Singapore welcomes this latest opportunity to work with the WTO Secretariat. Our bilateral partnership started as early as in 1996 when Singapore signed the Singapore-WTO Third Country Training Programme (TCTP) to partner the Secretariat in conducting joint technical assistance programmes for developing economies.

3. Singapore also had the privilege of hosting the annual Regional Trade Policy Courses (RTPCs) for the Asia-Pacific region from 2007 to 2010. These four courses have equipped more than 100 participants from over 25 economies in the region with a solid foundation of knowledge about the WTO, taking into account the Asia-Pacific regional context.

4. Just yesterday, we officially launched the WTO Chair's Programme at the National University of Singapore (NUS). This Programme will bolster our efforts to build up expertise in trade policy and research in the region.

5. Our joint programmes have targeted not only trade officials but also reached out to regional legislators. Since 2009, Singapore has been working with the WTO and the Temasek Foundation Centre for Trade and Negotiations (TFCTN) to organise the Asian Parliamentarian Workshops to deepen parliamentarians' understanding of the WTO and to increase their capacity to make trade-related legislation. About 80 parliamentarians have participated in the three workshops since 2009.

Singapore as a strong supporter of WTO

6. Singapore's close partnership with the WTO underscores the importance Singapore places on the multilateral system. As a small city-state, international trade is critical to Singapore's continued economic growth and development, with trade amounting to three times our GDP. Free and open trade enables our traders to leverage on international markets to reach new customers and brings

to our consumers a greater variety and quality of products and services at globally competitive prices.

7. Singapore, like many other states, relies on a strong WTO to ensure a rules-based multilateral trading system. It is only with the clear and transparent rules negotiated at the WTO that all countries can be assured of a systematic framework in which the flow of goods and services throughout the globe can be enhanced.

8. Singapore strives to play our part at the WTO by being active in several plurilateral groups, including brainstorming and drafting groups at both the Ambassadorial and technical levels.¹ Through continued dialogue and cooperation with other WTO Members, Singapore has sought to bridge divergent positions so as to provide continued momentum for the multilateral process.

The deadlock in DDA negotiations

9. As a staunch supporter of the multilateral trading system and the Doha Round, Singapore, like many others, is disappointed that we will not be able to conclude the DDA negotiations this year after 10 years of negotiation. Concluding the DDA would have provided a much needed stimulus package for the global economy. The binding of new unilateral trade liberalisation by WTO

¹ For information only: for instance, Singapore is a member of the Colorado Group, an informal group that meets to discuss developments in the TF negotiations; Friends of Anti-Dumping, a coalition which is seeking more disciplines on the use of anti-dumping measures; Friends of Sectors, an informal grouping, comprising of members which have co-sponsored at least one sectoral initiative and encourage others to join.

Members, and the strengthening of existing rules will provide greater predictability to the conduct of international trade.

10. According to estimates by the Peterson Institute, the 22 major traders alone – developed and developing – stand to lose annual gains of US\$280 billion, if the DDA is not concluded.²

The WTO Ministerial Conference in December (“MC8”)

11. We will all face an important junction at the upcoming Ministerial Conference in December. Already, many observers have commented that the Doha stalemate has tempered enthusiasm for the multilateral trading system. We are at the point where the threat of another economic recession – with a debt crisis in the eurozone and a weakening US economy – may lead to a resurgence of protectionist tendencies. It is therefore important and crucial that the Ministerial Conference succeed in providing guidance for the WTO to start the new year productively on the Doha Development Agenda and address the many issues and challenges that confront the WTO. In the words of Mr Pascal Lamy, we cannot expect the issues on the agenda “to disappear if we were to stop the talks and reboot.”³

² The Peterson study was titled “Figuring Out the Doha Round” and published in 2010. These 22 major traders comprise 7 developed and 15 developing countries, accounting for almost three-quarters of all global imports and exports and nearly 90% of global GDP. The developed countries are: Australia, Canada, the EU, Japan, Norway, Switzerland and the US. The 15 developing countries are Argentina, Brazil, China, Colombia, India, Indonesia, Korea, Malaysia, Mexico, Pakistan, the Philippines, South Africa, Taiwan, Thailand and Turkey.

³ Pascal Lamy’s speech to CUTS on 6th September 2011: “Nor do I think that these issues would disappear if we were to stop the talks and reboot.”

12. We should explore new ways to overcome the DDA logjam. Could it be that we need to scale down the complexity of trade negotiations by reducing the number of issues so that we can conclude negotiations more quickly? How do we then ensure that there is no cherry-picking of issues?

13. More importantly, we must remember that the WTO is more than the DDA. We need to take a closer look at how the WTO can be updated to take into account recent developments. The fact that the DDA negotiations have dragged on for ten years means that the agenda looks increasingly dated. How do we deal with investment and competition policy issues at the multilateral level, issues which are now the norm in most FTAs? How do we address contemporary concerns such as climate change, food security and exchange rate and trade? How do we ensure that countries will not use environmental concerns as a cover for protectionism? How can we find the delicate balance between the need to reduce the number of issues so that we can conclude the DDA negotiations but, at the same time, address new issues which are not currently on the agenda so that the trade rules are updated for the 21st century?

Conclusion

14. In this regard, the Policy Dialogue is relevant and timely in its agenda-allowing for substantive discussions about the continued importance of a

multilateral trade agenda, the relevance of the DDA goals, and the future challenges which we will have to face together. We hope that this will be a forum where we can have open and thoughtful reflections on the Doha negotiations over the past decade as well as discuss some bold and innovative ideas to strengthen the WTO as an institution.

15. I hope that it will be the first of many of such dialogues and wish you a good and fruitful meeting. Thank you.