

**AMBASSADOR-AT-LARGE TOMMY KOH'S
SPEECH AT THE LAUNCH OF THE SINGAPORE CHAIR
OF THE WTO CHAIRS PROGRAMME
TUESDAY, 4 OCTOBER 2011
GRAND COPTHORNE WATERFRONT SINGAPORE**

Salutations

Dr Patrick Low, Prof Tan Cheng Han, Prof Robert Beckman,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

2 I thank my friend, Mr Pascal Lamy, the distinguished Director-General of WTO, Dean Tan and Prof Beckman for inviting me to officiate at this happy occasion.

3 I thank Dr Low for coming from Geneva to be with us today. I also thank the WTO Chairs of China, Prof Zhang Lei; of Indonesia, Pak Riza Noer Arfani; and Vietnam, Prof Vu Quoc Huy, for honouring us with their presence. I look forward to hearing their presentations later.

Launch of the Singapore WTO Chair

4 The launch of the Singapore Chair marks another milestone in Singapore's partnership with the WTO.

5 It builds upon the NUS Law Faculty's successful hosting of four editions of the Regional Trade Policy Course (RTPC) between 2007 and 2010. The RTPC serves to equip senior officials from the Asia-Pacific region with a comprehensive understanding of the WTO's laws and policies. It also empowers them to contribute positively to their respective governments' formulation of trade policies. I thank Prof Margaret Liang for having done an extremely good job as director of the course in Singapore. We are also indebted to Prof Locknie Hsu for directing the course in the first year, 2007. We are very pleased

that this baton has been passed on to India which is hosting the RTPC currently.

6 The WTO Chair at the NUS Law School plugs the School into a strong network of 15 distinguished universities around the world who have put their thought leadership towards supporting the WTO and its activities. This is a welcome development which deepens Singapore's longstanding support for the multilateral trading system. It is also beneficial for the Centre for International Law (CIL) and NUS to gain access to the growing discourse of international trade law and the norm-setting functions of the WTO.

7 I am very pleased that my good friend and colleague, Prof Michael Ewing-Chow has been appointed as the first holder of the WTO Chair at NUS. Michael is the head of the programme on trade and investment policy and law at the CIL. He is also the co-director of a path-breaking research project on ASEAN integration through law.

Challenges faced by the multilateral trading system

8 This launch also takes place during a testing period for the multilateral trading system. Despite almost 10 years of negotiations, the Doha Round remains at an impasse. Questions have naturally been raised over the future of the multilateral trading system.

9 Meanwhile, there are many challenges ahead in these economically troubled times. The major developed economies face sluggish growth, and some, like the EU, are revisiting the basic assumptions of their political economies. Recent WTO figures indicate that there will be a slowdown in global trade in 2011 with growth forecasted at 5.8 percent, down from the original 6.5 percent.

10 There is a real threat of increased domestic pressure for protectionism in many countries. A recent report by the WTO showed that the G20 countries introduced 122 new trade restrictive measures

from October 2010 to April 2011, notwithstanding their repeated pledges not to do so.

The importance of a strong, rules-based multilateral trading system

11 As a staunch supporter of the multilateral trading system and the Doha Round, Singapore believes that a strong, rules-based, global trading system is still the best paradigm for continued growth and prosperity for all economies, both developed and developing. The WTO is bigger than the Doha Round. It remains very much the guardian of international trade rules. Much of its regular work in monitoring obligations, dispute settlement and promoting transparency often goes un-noticed and under-appreciated. These are the factors which keep global trade moving along smoothly, even as we pursue ongoing negotiations. One of the best kept secrets is that the WTO's dispute settlement process works. I have participated in three dispute panels and can personally testify to the efficacy and fairness of the system. I would like to see more Singaporeans and Asians taking part in such panels.

12 To break the Doha impasse, it is imperative that we see beyond each of our domestic difficulties and continue to push for multilateral trade liberalisation. Provided all economies work together in this spirit, there is still a chance to build on developments of the last decade to reach a new deal. Singapore will continue to work with all parties to find a way forward.

13 We must, as always, guard against any back-sliding, and resist the temptation to raise trade barriers, or resort to protectionist practices in the absence of an overall agreement.

8th WTO Ministerial Conference

14 Discussions in Geneva are now centred on pursuing a strong outcome for the forthcoming 8th WTO Ministerial Conference in

December. In our view, this should include a consensus on a pragmatic way ahead for the DDA, recognising the political realities.

15 The Ministerial Conference in December is also important for the WTO's continued work in the non-DDA issues. It is our hope that discussions between now and December will be constructively guided by the underlying principle to protect and uphold the great value that we all place in the WTO.

16 Thank you very much.

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