

**Remarks Ambassador Santiago Wills of Colombia**  
**Chair of the Fisheries WTO Subsidies Negotiations**  
**Interactive dialogue 4: Making fisheries sustainable and**  
**providing access for small-scale artisanal fishers to**  
**marine resources and markets**  
**3:00-6:00PM, 29 June 2022,**  
**Altice Arena, Tejo Hall, Lisbon, Portugal**

Good afternoon, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen. I would like to thank the United Nations, for inviting me to this very important interactive dialogue. This is very timely, and it gives me great pleasure to deliver good news.

The SDG 14.6 mandated the WTO to negotiate disciplines to prohibit subsidies contributing to IUU fishing and overfishing, taking into account the needs of developing countries.

After many years and tremendous effort, on 17 June, WTO Ministers met the SDG 14.6 target by adopting a legally binding multilateral Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies.

This is a great achievement of many firsts.

- The first SDG target met;
- The first environmental agreement at the WTO; and
- The first and largest legally binding and enforceable multilateral agreement focusing on Ocean sustainability.

But, most of all, it is a big step forward to redirect Government funds toward supporting environmental sustainability instead of undermining it.

In a nutshell, the new Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies will tackle the worst forms of government support by:

- Prohibiting subsidies that contribute to illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing;
- Prohibiting subsidies that contribute to fishing stocks that are overfished; and
- Prohibiting subsidies for fishing in the unregulated high seas.

The Agreement also contains ground-breaking notification and transparency requirements for fisheries subsidies and fisheries management. We have been held back by limited data, making it difficult to combat the scourge of harmful subsidies. But the Agreement will greatly improve data collection, so when we build on existing commitments in the future to negotiate more restraints on subsidies, we will have the information we need to target our action. Briefly speaking also as co-Chair of the Fisheries Committee of the OECD, I must say that these are great news, as it will greatly facilitate the hard task of the OECD – and in particular in this case its Fisheries Committee - in collecting and assessing this type of information.

This is also good news for small scale artisanal fishers. Most recent estimates suggest that nearly 50 per cent of assessed

stocks are being overfished. This is particularly concerning for those fishers who depend on these marine resources for their food and livelihoods. Dwindling fish stocks translates to dwindling economic opportunities for those poor and vulnerable fishing communities. Now we have an opportunity to reverse this trend by stopping subsidies which put additional pressure on these depleted stocks. Instead, some of this public spending can be used to support sustainable fishing practices of artisanal fishers.

Around 22 billion USD a year are currently being spent on harmful subsidies. These subsidies are responsible in large part for the catastrophic depletion of marine resources. Instead, this money should be invested in the sustainable fishing, including fisheries management best practices.

The Agreement also anticipates and fulfils the need for technical assistance and capacity building for developing country Members and Least Developed Country Members. In particular, the Agreement establishes a funding mechanism – that we call the Fish Fund - to assist them in implementing the Agreement by:

- Integrating fisheries sustainability elements into their subsidies policies and practices to benefit the fisheries sector;
- Strengthening sustainable fisheries management systems, and

- Improving notifications and transparency.

We've already received substantial pledges from donor countries and I encourage more donors to do so. This support will be vital to ensure that the Agreement works for the interests for developing countries and their millions of small-scale artisanal fishers.

While what I have outlined is a significant step, this is the first steps of many.

In terms of implementation at the institutional level, a Committee on Fisheries Subsidies will be established at the WTO. The overall objective of this Committee is to oversee the implementation and operation of this Agreement. WTO Members will have an opportunity of consulting on any matter relating to the operation of this Agreement or the furtherance of its objectives. Committee work at the WTO is very important for implementation. Any Member would be able to raise specific concerns at the Committee and in many cases, these concerns a resolved through dialogue.

The binding nature to WTO Agreements means that Members have the right to recourse to dispute settlement. As such, Members can raise a dispute if they are of the view that another Member is not in compliance with the Agreement and could result in the application of remedies. The enforceability of the Agreement, whether through the Committee or through dispute

settlement, raises the stakes. Members would be held accountable for their actions thereby translating to real change.

Equally important is the commitment by Ministers to continue work. In adopting the Agreement, Ministers built in a mechanism for the WTO to launch a second wave of negotiations, aimed at enhancing the rules to further discipline subsidies that contribute to overfishing and overcapacity. One can say this commitment is for an SDG14.6-plus given that it has the potential to add more disciplines to the Agreement.

So with that, I invite you to join me in applauding 164 governments in reaching this significant milestone and already thinking about how to add more rules to curb more subsidies. Next, WTO Members must take the domestic steps necessary so that the Agreement can enter into force. I would like to take this opportunity to urge all governments, to do so as soon as possible. Even for this stage developing Members could benefit from technical assistance and capacity building in making the necessary reforms and in ratifying the Agreement. Our Oceans waited long enough, more than 21 years. Our oceans cannot wait any longer.

In closing, I must say, it has been an honour and a privilege to have been chairing these negotiations. There are not many times in one's career you can say you are making a real difference. It was not an easy task, and nothing multilateral for which 164 Members need to agree by consensus is easy. But with hard

work, determination, and the right political will – WTO Members truly came together. We often speak of the "tragedy of the commons", but this collective effort demonstrates that everyone wins when we work together for the public good. This is a win for the fish, a win for fishing communities - particularly the most vulnerable - a win for a more sustainable future, and last but not least, a win for multilateralism. Thank you to all Members of the WTO for this unprecedented accomplishment.

Madame Moderator, Ministers Co-Chairs, Discussants and fellow panelists, I'm obliged.