

Brief on the WTO Negotiating Group meeting on Trade Facilitation
on 9 and 10 November 2005

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The WTO Trade Facilitation Negotiating Group Meeting was held in Geneva on 9 and 10 November 2005. The WCO Secretariat, along with the Secretariats of IMF, OECD, UNCTAD and World Bank, was invited to attend the meeting.

It was the first meeting to discuss the draft Group's report for the WTO Hong Kong Ministerial Conference (TN/TF/W/72 (restricted: if the member administration wishes to obtain this, please contact the Secretariat)) which was circulated to the WTO members on 28 October. The entire session was devoted to the negotiations on the text of the report. Although some new proposals were tabled, no negotiation was made on the elements of future WTO commitments on trade facilitation at this time.

With respect to the draft report for Hong Kong Ministerial Conference, there was a common observation among the WTO Members that the general structure and elements of the draft report was fine. Nevertheless, there remained significant gaps among countries in the phrases/words used for the recommendations. Developed countries and some developing countries accepted the text in principle with possible minimum modification on the factual issues. Some countries stressed that the linkage between the commitments, implementation capacity, assistance and special and differential treatment should be reaffirmed in the text. The other countries requested a removal of specific timing from the text.

Some delegations requested financial assistance for their capital-based Customs officer to attend the Negotiating Group meeting in Geneva. No negotiations or reactions were made concerning this request in the meeting.

In the session of the second day, the revised text was circulated as a room document (restricted: if the member administration wishes to obtain this, please contact the Secretariat). Nevertheless, the revised text could not help bridge the gap among the countries. The Chairman announced the suspension of the meeting. The meeting would be resumed in the week of 14 November.

The WCO also had meetings with other international organizations and countries during this mission. (see press release (<http://www.wcoomd.org/ie/en/Press/Press%20Release%20WTO%20Nov%202005%20EN.htm>), slides used at the meeting with the developing countries, and Information Sheets (http://www.wcoomd.org/ie/WTO/TradeFacil_E.htm))