

Sir,

We the undersigned are chief executive officers/chairmen of some of the world's leading corporations. We have supported the Doha round of trade negotiations since its inception and many of us have given advice on its substance to our governments. At the initiative of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), we are writing to member governments of the World Trade Organization (WTO) to convey our mounting concern that these crucial negotiations are in serious trouble. The original date agreed at Doha for completion of the negotiations has been missed; and the continuing snail's pace of progress is jeopardizing the prospect of meeting the revised deadline of end-2006.

We strongly believe that the WTO-based multilateral trading system is one of the central pillars of international cooperation. Multilateral initiatives to liberalize world trade and improve market access for goods and services are a major driving force for global economic growth, job creation, and wider consumer choice – as well as keeping in check the ever-present threat of protectionism. We underline our conviction that a successful Doha Round is vital to enable business to continue to play a leading role in the eradication of poverty and the raising of global living standards.

A major milestone is looming which may very well be decisive in determining the ultimate fate of the Doha Round. In the middle of next month, WTO member governments will be meeting in Hong Kong for their Ministerial Conference – the WTO's supreme decision-making body. WTO Director-General Pascal Lamy has emphasized that Hong Kong will not be just another checkpoint in the negotiations; "it is our last and best chance to move this Round to a successful conclusion by the end of 2006".

We agree with Mr. Lamy that much will be at stake in Hong Kong. Up to now, however, we do not see that urgency reflected in a firm determination by governments to make the solid, substantive progress before Hong Kong that will be essential to enable the Ministerial Conference to propel the negotiations to a successful outcome a year later. And we know from experience that ministerial meetings left with too many decisions to take at the last moment usually break up in disappointment or failure.

We therefore call upon WTO governments to redouble their efforts to break out of the current impasse in the Doha negotiations and accomplish the various breakthroughs still required to make Hong Kong a defining moment in a positive sense. We believe that the challenge is political more than technical, and requires the commitment of governments from the highest levels to break the logjams. It particularly requires the personal attention of the leaders of the WTO governments represented at the G8 Gleneagles Summit last July who pledged themselves to work for the success of the Round. The need is for strong political leadership. And the time for it is now!

Given the slow progress to date, it will be an uphill task to conclude the Doha Round on time. But it is by no means mission impossible. Success will be within reach if the political will is found to make the compromises in the few months ahead that recognize the common interest in success and the collective price of failure. Business across the world urges WTO member governments to face up to their responsibilities and re-instil confidence among producers, consumers and investors that the multilateral trading system – which has done so much to raise global living standards over the past half-century – is still safe in their hands.

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