ICC welcomes progress on e-commerce at the WTO

14 December 2021

ICC has welcomed a statement made today by the Trade Ministers of Australia, Japan and Singapore announcing significant progress in the ongoing e-commerce negotiations within the World Trade Organization.

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The statement notes that 'good convergence' has been achieved on eight issues — specifically: online consumer protection; electronic signatures and authentication; unsolicited commercial electronic messages; open government data; electronic contracts; transparency; paperless trading; and open internet access.

The Ministers have set out the objective to secure convergence on the majority of issues left open to discussion by the end of 2022.

ICC Secretary General John W.H. Denton AO said:

"Today's statement brings us a step closer to the ultimate goal of establishing robust multilateral rules capable of harnessing the power of digital technologies to truly democratize trade.

"The potential gains from a new WTO agreement on e-commerce are too great to leave sitting on the table in Geneva. We now need to see a concerted sprint towards a final, welfare-enhancing deal in 2022.

"Tough choices must now be made, not least with respect to cross-border data transfers, to forge a deal capable of addressing the challenges and frictions faced by businesses in the real economy every day. We stand ready to inform those discussions drawing on the expertise of our global business network."

Andrew Wilson, ICC's Global Policy Director, added:

"We are delighted to see the emphasis placed by the Ministers on making the WTO moratorium on customs duties on electronic transmissions permanent. As evidenced by our recent global industry statement (https://iccwbo.org/content/uploads/sites/3/2021/11/global-industry-statement-on-the-wto-moratorium-on-customs-duties-on-electronic-transmissions.pdf), the moratorium is critical to the COVID-19 recovery, key to supply chain resilience for manufacturing and services industries, and essential for consumer welfare."