

WTO Chief concludes India visit; seeks support for MC12

By TIOL News Service

NEW DELHI, OCT 23, 2021: WTO

Director-General, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, completed a three-day visit to India yester. She held meetings with India's Finance, Commerce & External Affairs Ministers. She also met the Prime Minister and welcomed India's support for 12th Ministerial Conference (MC12).

"I wanted to share with Prime Minister Modi and his senior officials where we are with respect to preparations for MC12 and secure India's leadership," DG Okonjo-Iweala said. "India is a leader, India has a strong voice at the WTO and if we are to have a successful MC12, India's leadership will be very important."

In her meeting with Prime Minister Modi, the two discussed multilateralism, structural reforms to the Indian economy, and the road to MC12. The Prime Minister stressed that India is a large democracy and there is a need to listen to India and take its views into account. The Prime Minister also reiterated his and India's support to the WTO.

The Director-General also congratulated the Prime Minister and his government for achieving the milestone of administering one billion COVID-19 vaccine doses as well as India's recent decision to lift export restrictions on vaccines.

DG Okonjo-Iweala met with business leaders and vaccine manufacturers last Thursday at events organized by the Confederation of Indian Industry. She heard from industry the current supply chain challenges they face and what the WTO could do to help address them. She urged India's business community to take a more proactive role in the WTO discussions and said their support was needed to achieve successes at MC12.

The DG heard from vaccine manufacturers about their efforts to ramp up COVID-19 vaccine production and distribution and the challenges they face in overcoming bottlenecks and securing supply chains. She noted the work by her and other agency heads on the Multilateral Leaders Task Force on COVID-19 to help track, coordinate and advance delivery of COVID-19 health tools to developing countries and to mobilize efforts to remove critical roadblocks. Vaccine manufacturers stressed their concerns about eventual worldwide excess capacity for vaccine manufacture as the COVID-19 pandemic runs its course.

The DG also met with a group of Indian tech firms and start-ups to discuss how the digital economy is contributing to India's development and the various initiatives under way in areas such as e-payments, digital health, and development of new e-commerce platforms.

On 22 October, she met with women representatives of various self-help groups engaged in efforts to meet the needs of poorer communities during the pandemic. The discussions underlined the DG's call for the WTO to return to its core principles of using trade to further sustainable development and employment and raise living standards.