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**STATEMENT BY H.E. MR VLADIMIR ILICHEV
DEPUTY MINISTER OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

RUSSIAN FEDERATION

It's an honour for me to participate in the Twelfth Ministerial Conference of the WTO. I'd like to thank our colleagues from Kazakhstan, Mr. Timur Suleimenov, Switzerland and the WTO Director-General for their unwavering commitment and personal contributions to MC12. This is a milestone event, which could bring a lot to support economies and trade.

More than ever before trade intersects with a broad array of issues and concerns, which have a powerful impact on people's day-to-day lives. There are many examples of this – from hyperinflation of prices for foodstuffs, energy and consumer goods, which we are witnessing today, to climate change. But none of these international - and national - problems will be resolved any easier by restricting trade, closing borders, or dismantling the international trade law. Just the opposite.

This is why Russia continues to remain a staunch supporter of the rules-based multilateral trading system, as embodied in the WTO. This unique instrument – our common accomplishment – is invaluable in promoting smooth, predictable and free trade flows around the world.

Today the system of global trade governance is facing a serious crisis of confidence in it. This is understandable: largely a product of a bygone era, the WTO lacks the properties to effectively tackle newly emerged challenges. But now, in the aftermath of the pandemic and further threatened by the sharp rise of unilateralism, protectionism, encroaching food and energy security risks and overall recession of global economy, we are more than ever in need of the WTO. WTO that is well functioning, rules-based and adequately equipped to promptly respond to the needs of its Members. WTO, where the rules of trade are implemented.

This Conference was four years in the making. Now is the critical time to harness all the political will and use it wisely to chart a clear path forward for the work of and in this Organization. This will be the living proof that the WTO is not a relic of the past, but the key to our common prosperous future.

From Russia's perspective, shoring up the WTO requires the following.

First. The WTO must operate smoothly. The launch of practical work on the WTO reform is among the most urgent tasks. The challenges that undermine the full functioning of the WTO, including the Appellate body impasse, should be tackled in an inclusive way that will accommodate for the interests of all Members.

Second. Another challenge is the **fragmentation of the WTO**. The organization is splitting into various "clubs" of like-minded members and, thus, gradually loses its spirit of multilateralism. We need to increasingly focus on what unites us and promote dialogue on the issues, that bring us apart.

Third. Our economies are increasingly challenged by global economic crises, pandemics, growing dependence on technology access, raw materials, environment and food markets. Trade has a fundamental stabilizing value for these phenomena. But **we clearly lack rules for emergency situations**.

Some are seeking their salvation in national security clauses or spending trillions of dollars on artificially supporting competitiveness. Some are simply introducing trade and investment barriers, taking advantage of the prevailing chaos. We all need a common and clear understanding regarding how we can act in the face of crises and how to avoid them. The WTO's toolkit should be effective in enabling supply chains stability and resilience against disruptions.

Fourth. We need to **break the deadlock in the negotiations** on the current agenda.

We must accelerate thinking on longstanding topics like **agriculture**. Russia, as one of the world's largest agricultural producers and exporters, attaches great importance to this negotiations track, advocating for work programmes on key issues in this field.

Promotion of **global food security** is an area where the WTO can make a significant contribution. However, our joint success depends on Members' ability to ensure objective and balanced assessment of the current situation and its underlying causes. We are ready to participate actively and responsibly in collective efforts to find ways of improving the situation on the global food market.

Russia has spared no effort to help design the multilateral system of combating **illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing**. We hope that these efforts would pay off, advancing the noble cause of preventing unlawful activities and safeguarding the global fish stocks.

Meanwhile, the **lack of progress on traditional agenda must not be the reason to turn a blind eye to the new trade topics**, such as e-commerce, services, investments or MSMEs. All these areas require universal rules, which is demonstrated by the high level of Membership's engagement. But such rules need to be shaped in a way that would account for the interests of all and bring benefits to all, including developing countries and LDCs. That is why Russia advocates for more Members to participate in this work. Moreover, we need a solution on how to incorporate the results of such negotiations into the WTO legal framework.

Same applies to the recently emerged issues in the WTO agenda. **Climate change** is among them. The WTO should play a role in tackling this global problem. However, let's not forget that the WTO deals with trade, and it should fight against protectionism under any umbrella and of any color. Including environmental protectionism. It would be wise to protect its vital mission.

Lastly, we consider the expansion of the Membership of the Organization to be an important area of the WTO activity, which requires a "classless" approach. No State should be discriminated due to its economic development model or political allegiance. Successful and timely conclusion of accession negotiations would help support Organization as a universal trade tool.
