

**Remarks by Johann Human, Director, WTO Rules
Division, on the Occasion of the Release of UNCTAD's
Trade and Environment Review 2016
16 January 2017**

I would like to thank UNCTAD for inviting the WTO to participate in this event today. This opportunity provides me also with the chance to congratulate and thank UNCTAD for the important work that it and its contributors have done in producing the Trade and Environment Review 2016 on fish trade. This publication could not have come at a better time, and this is not a mere nicety: the report deals with important issues which will be on the agenda of the Oceans Conference, but also deals with the issue of fisheries subsidies, an issue which will, most likely, also be on the agenda of the WTO's next Ministerial Meeting.

As a young man I had the unique opportunity to spend some time in the South Atlantic Ocean, in the vicinity of Tristan da Cunha, aboard a hydrographical survey ship. While the job of our vessel was to chart the waters around the island after the recent eruption of the volcano on the island, I spent my time in awe of the abundance of the riches of the ocean – my fellow crew members were less interested in the survey work, but more so in the easy fishing: they would drop a line and wow!, within seconds there was a bite and they would land huge majestic fish, one after the other, after the other! I was profoundly impressed by the vastness of the ocean, and by the seeming limitless bounty of marine life with which it abounded.

It seemed to me in those days that the ocean was so great that it could not be sullied by the hand of man. But today we all know better. With our ever-growing population and daily technological advances, we have become aware that the world's oceans are more fragile than they appear,

and that we have an obligation of stewardship if we want to preserve our oceans and their resources for future generations.

This obligation is recognized in Sustainable Development Goal 14. SDG 14 calls upon us to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development. While the international community has been working to this end since long before SDG 14 was formulated, a virtue of SDG 14 is that it groups in one place a range of related and interdependent targets, all of which are critical to fulfilling our stewardship obligations.

The UN Oceans Conference 2017 is aimed at bringing together stakeholders from the public and private sectors as well as NGOs, to form partnerships and undertake commitments aimed at the full implementation of SDG 14. The Conference thus has a critical role to play in both focusing our minds on the tasks ahead, and mobilizing the many different actors who will have to contribute if we are to achieve SDG 14, and I would like to particularly express my appreciation to UN DESA for its leadership role in organizing the Conference. The contribution of both Fiji and Sweden in taking a leadership role in organizing the Conference is also acknowledged.

From the WTO perspective, SDG Target 14.6 is of particular importance. As you all know, Target 14.6 focuses on the issue of fisheries subsidies, and more specifically on the development of disciplines to prohibit certain subsidies that contribute to overcapacity and overfishing, and on the elimination of subsidies that contribute to Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated – IUU - fishing. And it sets a deadline of 2020 to develop these new disciplines. While the issue of fisheries subsidies is one that is being addressed in many fora and at the national, regional and

multilateral level, the WTO continues to be a key forum for this work, and is specifically referred to in Target 14.6.

We have of course been at the work of negotiating fisheries subsidies disciplines in the WTO for a long time – indeed, it has now been fifteen years – and the process has been long and difficult. As with the WTO's multilateral trade negotiations launched in 2001 generally, broad support in principle for the development of disciplines has not always translated into agreement on the details including, *inter alia*, which subsidies should be disciplined, the nature and extent of such disciplines, the role of fisheries management, and the nature and extent of special and differential treatment for developing Members. Indeed, at times it has seemed that consensus of new disciplines would always remain out of reach.

Yet despite the challenges, there have been some signs of a renewed commitment to achieve a meaningful outcome. There are likely a variety of reasons for the renewed energy that we have seen in our negotiations. For many Members, the strong message sent by the adoption of SDG 14, and Target 14.6 in particular, has been cited. The adoption of SDG 14, in turn, appears to reflect a growing realization among developing Members, and particularly those with the most limited financial resources and least-developed fleets, that they have everything to lose, and little to gain, from a subsidy race that they cannot win. Progress in other negotiating fora, and internal subsidy reform efforts within some WTO Members, have also contributed.

Whatever the reasons, many Members have re-committed to the WTO fisheries subsidies negotiations, and are seeking outcomes by our next Ministerial meeting in Buenos Aires at the end of this year. And they are backing up this talk with action, in the form of negotiating proposals that

offer new and innovative approaches to possible new disciplines. Indeed, the Negotiating Group on Rules has four recent proposals before it, from both developed and developing Members, that have provided a basis to resume our work. The Group already began to examine those proposals before the winter break, and will be returning to them at a meeting next week.

In this work, the WTO is not alone. Fisheries subsidies are only one part of a much bigger set of interdependent policy challenges that must be addressed collectively by the world's nations and a host of institutions at the multilateral and regional level. The integrated approach taken by SDG 14, and the collective global approach to these problems as reflected in the UN Oceans Conference 2017, is therefore essential if we are going to assure the conservation and sustainable use of our oceans, seas and marine resources.

In this context, contributions like UNCTAD's Trade and Environment Review 2016 are vitally important. This Review takes a cross-cutting look at the many challenges confronting our oceans, and challenges leading experts from multilateral and regional organizations, academia, think tanks and civil society to share their knowledge, enthusiasm and creative thinking about how we can advance towards the achievement of SDG 14, including of course, Target 14.6. Indeed, simply looking at the range of colleagues present here today is for me a very encouraging sign of the collective commitment to our oceans.

Of course, no one should be a starry-eyed optimist. We all know full well that the challenges that we -- and our oceans -- face will not be easy to resolve. We have tried, and failed, in the past. Guillermo, as a valiant and dedicated past Chair of the Rules Negotiating Group, is only too aware of how hard the task is. But the stakes are too high not to try,

with all our collective might, to achieve agreement. So I thank Guillermo, UNCTAD, UNDESA, the FAO and all my other colleagues in this room for their continued commitment.

Thank you.