

Global Policy Issues

WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

Established in 1995, the World Trade Organization (WTO) is the only international agency with the goal of addressing the rules of trade among the nations of the world. Its main function is to reduce barriers to trade and to ensure that trade occurs as freely as possible. The WTO is the successor of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), established in 1948. GATT launched a series of trade negotiations, or rounds, initially dealing with tariff reductions but later expanded to include antidumping measures and other non-tariff issues. The last full round, the 1986–94 Uruguay Round, led to the creation of the WTO. GATT is the basis of the WTO rules dealing with the trade of goods and services, as well as intellectual property and the resolution of disputes. The complete set of rules consists of approximately 60 agreements totaling more than 30,000 pages. Agreements are negotiated by the member countries and ratified by their governments.

The top-level decision-making organization within the WTO is the Ministerial Conference, which convenes approximately every two years. In November 2001, the fourth Ministerial Conference, held in Doha, Qatar, issued a declaration known as the Doha Development Agenda (DDA). The DDA includes negotiations on a variety of topics related to implementing agreements from the 1986–94 Uruguay Round, including reductions in tariffs and non-tariff barriers on thousands of agricultural and non-agricultural products and the liberalization of trade in services. Twenty subjects are addressed in the DDA.

After seven years of negotiations, the Doha Round was expected to conclude in July 2008 with the adoption of modalities for the reduction of subsidies for agricultural goods and tariffs for industrial and agricultural goods, as well as the reduction of barriers to services trade in banking, insurance, energy and environmental services. The Doha Round was not concluded, however, principally because agreement could not be reached on the special safeguard mechanism (SSM) for developing countries against import increases that could threaten their agricultural industries. The dispute on the wording of the clause pitted the United States, which represented exporters of raw agricultural materials, against India, which represented subsistence farmers. Parties continue to work to narrow differences on SSM and other issues. In 2009, WTO ministers considered how to bring the Doha Round to a conclusion when the next meeting is held in New Delhi in 2010.

INTERNATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATION UNION

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU), headquartered in Geneva, is a specialized agency within the United Nations. Its mission includes coordinating the establishment of telecommunications networks around the world. Its aim is to help the international community provide improved information and communications services to all the people of the planet. The ITU is composed of three core sectors: radiocommunication (ITU-R), standardization (ITU-S) and development (ITU-D). The ITU-R manages the global radio frequency (RF) spectrum and satellite orbits and ensures the interference-free operation of the radiocommunication systems. The

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