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Statement by WTO Ambassador Michael Punke on the Information Technology Agreement Expansion

Geneva, Switzerland
*As Delivered*

“The United States is grateful for all the hard work done this week to bring us this close to an ITA expansion agreement.

“We are gratified that the U.S.-China breakthrough last month allowed us all to get back to the table and that so much of the US-China breakthrough agreement has been embraced by our plurilateral process. Indeed that bilateral breakthrough is the pillar upon which a potential plurilateral deal rests. We appreciate this was widely recognized by participants.

“The United States worked tirelessly all week, in Geneva, Washington, and in various capitals to build plurilateral consensus on a final agreement that is consistent with the US-China breakthrough.

“We want to recognize the significant flexibility shown by a number of participants in order to bring us this close to an agreement. In our disappointment at not reaching a deal, we should not fail to recognize those who made great efforts this week towards a deal. In particular, I would note the flexibility shown by Costa Rica, Malaysia, Israel, Guatemala, and Korea.

“Of course, this is a plurilateral process. We are all equal partners in this effort. That’s how the system works, and we acknowledged that through the course of negotiating the breakthrough with China.

“Through the consultations over the last few weeks, it became clear that certain Members had important interests that were not fully captured by the bilateral agreement. And those members came a long way toward accepting 99% of that agreement, but asked that small adjustments be made in order to be able to accept the deal.
“Indeed, we experienced a similar situation in the context of the bilateral agreement between the United States and India that unlocked the deadlock on the Bali Agreements. That bilateral agreement was brought back to Geneva and then went through a process of significant adjustment to accommodate interests of other WTO Members, including the LDCs, the Africa Group, and Argentina. Only with those adjustments was an agreement was reached.

“Just like Trade Facilitation, we came to Geneva this week and worked hard to build a consensus around the bilateral agreement we concluded with China. But like TF, we have heard clearly that minor adjustments to the agreement would be needed in order to meet other Members’ interests.

“Like everyone in the room, we are disappointed not to be celebrating a deal this week. We missed a big opportunity.

“All of us will need to go back to our capitals and reflect hard on next steps.”