

WTO General Council discusses India's call for holding virtual ministerial meet on pandemic response

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NEW DELHI: The WTO's General Council has discussed India's call to convene a virtual ministerial meeting on the World Trade Organisation's response to the Covid-19 pandemic, including the patent waiver proposal. India on December 23, 2021 sent a letter to the General Council Chair to hold a virtual ministerial meeting on the response of WTO (World Trade Organisation) to the pandemic, including the proposal to waive certain provisions of the TRIPS agreement for Covid-19-related vaccines, therapeutics, and diagnostics. On January 10, the General Council Chair Ambassador Dacio Castillo (Honduras) convened a meeting to discuss the World Trade Organisation's response to the Covid-19 pandemic, WTO said in a statement.

After the meeting, Castillo said he would continue to hold consultations with members on the Indian proposal, underlining "the urgency and importance of reaching a meaningful outcome." A common WTO response to Covid-19 "remains an urgent priority for the membership," he said. WTO Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala has called for an urgent action towards a comprehensive WTO outcome on pandemic response.

"More than two years have passed since the onset of the pandemic. The emergence of the Omicron variant, which forced us to postpone our Twelfth Ministerial Conference, reminded us of the risks of allowing large sections of the world to remain unvaccinated," she said.

WTO is a 164-member multilateral body which formulates rules for global exports and imports and adjudicates disputes between two or more than two countries on trade-related issues.

Expressing disappointment over no progress on TRIPs (Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights) waiver proposal to deal with the pandemic, India has called for including this proposal into WTO's proposed response package.

In October 2020, India and South Africa submitted the first proposal, suggesting a waiver for all WTO members on the implementation of certain provisions of the TRIPs agreement in relation to the prevention, containment or treatment of Covid-19.

In May 2021, a revised proposal was submitted. TRIPs came into effect in January 1995. It is a multilateral agreement on intellectual property (IP) rights such as copyright, industrial designs, patents and protection of undisclosed information or trade secrets.