

5th WTO Ministerial Conference ends without consensus, with environment second on the agenda – Read briefing on IGES co-organised event

The 5th Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation ended on September 14, in Cancun, Mexico without consensus. In a Ministerial Conference dominated by agriculture and the “Singapore Issues” (Investment, transparency in government procurement, competition and trade facilitation) environment has been low on the agenda.

At the Fourth Ministerial Conference in Doha, Qatar, in November 2001, Ministers agreed to launch negotiations on certain aspects of the trade and environment linkage. These negotiations aim at clarifying the relationship between the multilateral trade and environment regimes, and cover also information exchange between WTO committees and MEA secretariats, as well as the liberalisation of trade in environmental goods and services.

At the Fifth Ministerial Meeting in Cancun, the WTO member countries came close to consensus (in the second revision of the Draft Cancun Ministerial Declaration submitted by the conference chairperson on September 13) on the issue of inviting the secretariats of the multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), invited thus far, and of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) to be observers in the Trade and Environment Committee Special Session, in accordance with its current practice, and for the duration of the negotiations. Talks among heads of delegations also seem to have come close to consensus on the issue of patenting of animals and plants, the Convention on Biological Diversity and traditional knowledge. Eco-labeling was among those more difficult issues.

IGES, in partnership with the Global Environment & Trade Study (GETS), the Global Industrial and social Progress Research Institute (GISPRI), the Fair Trade Center of Japan and other leading trade and environment policy experts from Japan and the United States took part in the Ministerial Conference in presenting papers and recommendations from *a joint US-Japan Task Force on Achieving Harmony in Trade and Environment*.

A joint US-Japan Task Force on Achieving Harmony in Trade and Environment seeks to take advantage of the opportunities provided by the Doha Declaration to enhance environmental considerations in international trade negotiations. The policy papers and recommendations which reviewed 1) trade and environment issues within the WTO and in light of the Doha Agenda; 2) the specific issue of the relationship between multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) and the global trade regime, and 3) global environmental governance, were presented under two panel discussions: “Achieving Harmony in Trade and Environment: New Views from the Pacific” and “Achieving Harmony in Trade and Environment: The Years of Experience.

These panel discussions, which were attended by a range of delegates and other participants to the Cancun Ministerial, indicated that while important progress has been made in integrating trade and environment since the 1992 United Nations Summit on

Environment and Development, there still is a long way to go in enhancing the mutual supportiveness of trade and environment.

With regard to Asia, the papers note that the boom in regional and bilateral free trade agreements (FTAs) that have been concluded in recent years remains dominated by issues of trade and investment liberalisation. Environment, though increasingly gaining in importance as an element in FTAs, is second on the agenda and greater efforts are needed in order to build environmental concerns into regional and bilateral trade regimes. See <http://www.gets.org/pages/harmony/> for full version of policy papers and recommendations. For further details contact: kamal@iges.or.jp or imai@iges.or.jp