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Special and Differential Treatment for Developing Countries to be decided at the Hong Kong Ministerial Conference

Developing countries' fear of being unable to compete and liberalize border measures at the same pace with industrialized countries is behind some of the demands for special and differential treatment in agriculture. There is a widespread consensus within the WTO members to produce results for special and differential treatment in favor of developing countries by the Hong Kong Ministerial Conference in December 2005. In the Doha Ministerial Declaration, WTO members agreed that all special and differential treatment provisions should be reviewed with a view to strengthening them and making them more effective and operational. In order to achieve these objectives, provisions for special and differential treatment must be in a form that is enforceable within the WTO system. The time frame for exemptions must be flexible enough to accommodate the different development needs of developing countries.

SPECIAL AND DIFFERENTIAL TREATMENT SHOULD BE CONCRETE AND ENFORCEABLE

Developing countries should be able to depend on the special and differential treatment provisions that declare support for problems arising from the implementation of the commitments under the WTO Agreements. Currently, there is no action that an aggrieved developing country can take to force another WTO member or an organization to act on these undertakings. A considerable element of discontent expressed by developing countries over the failures of the special and differential treatment provisions derives from resentment that they were misled into signing the "single undertaking" in the belief that these sorts of commitments would be concrete. By contrast, the commitments that they have accepted in return were all legally enforceable under the WTO. That's why special and differential treatment should be concrete and enforceable within the legal system of the WTO in order to promote poverty reduction, rural development, food security and to protect livelihoods of the poor in developing countries.

Further information:

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