

**DG Tang Remarks – 11th WHO-WIPO-WTO Symposium
13 December 2024**

DG Ngozi of the World Trade Organization,
ADG Nakatani of the World Health Organization,

Excellencies,
Dear Colleagues, Dear Friends,

It is said that invention is a solo sport, but innovation is a team sport. The same can be said of our work here in Geneva as well.

This is why I am very honored that today we can meet here and be hosted by my sister, DG Ngozi, as well as ADG Nakatani to continue a cross-agency approach to addressing complex but important issues around health, innovation and trade.

Let me also take this chance to embarrass DG Ngozi a little bit in her successful reappointment for a second term. The work of WTO – and I say this as an ex-trade lawyer and negotiator – is critical to global trade, to the global economy and to global peace, and I can think of no better person than you, Dr. Ngozi, to take on his Herculean task. Congratulations again!

I also want to give a shout out to my fellow Singaporean Dr. Jeremy Farrar. I count you as a Singaporean because – and not many of you may know this – Jeremy was born in Singapore and grew up in Singapore, so he is an honorary Singaporean! Thank you, Jeremy, for being here with us and we look forward to your keynote address.

In previous trilaterals, we have focused on various topics of great impact in the world. Today, our attention turns another such challenge, non-communicable diseases or NCDs.

Both DG Ngozi and ADG Nakatani have spoken very eloquently and in great detail about this subject, but one of the things I was quite surprised about is that 80 lives are lost to an NCD each minute – the vast majority not in developed economies, but in low- and middle-income countries. So this is not a rich country problem anymore; this is a global problem. And without urgent action, the chronic NCD burden will rise by 40% by the end of the decade. This will affect our ability to meet the SDGs as well.

And yet, as both have mentioned, NCDs have rarely been at the top of policy and healthcare agendas. Of course, I recognize the impact of the pandemic, but this has been a silent storm that has been brewing for some time, so we really need to pay attention to this.

And I think that innovation, backed by IP, and coupled with health and trade can help.

New and emerging solutions offer hope. New treatments promise more effective and personalized care. Advances in medical technologies, such as wearable devices and other MedTech, can transform early detection and diagnosis, saving lives and cutting costs. And the rise in the application of digital technologies in healthcare is transforming all these areas, with healthcare related mobile apps and telemedicine making it easier for people to access medical advice remotely, keep to treatment plans and manage conditions from home.

The key challenge here, though, is making sure these innovations go to the ground, get to grassroots, and help create real impact, especially in developing countries.

WIPO, like the WTO and the WHO, is stepping up our efforts in all these areas. We are creating a Centre of Excellence for Medical Manufacturing, which we hope will complement efforts in the WHO and many other agencies. We have just joined the Regional Vaccine Manufacturing Collective, a movement cutting across all agencies, including GAVI, CEPI, MPP and others, to help vaccine manufacturing in key countries. And we are working with industry groups, including the IFPMA, on antimicrobial resistance. We are trying to find very concrete things to do across the whole of Geneva and around the world as well.

But my belief is that a key, long-term solution in this area is to help Member States develop dynamic ecosystems, whether in trade, in health, or in innovation.

This will help them more effectively absorb technology that is being transferred or licensed as well as to support the deployment and commercialization of home-grown innovations and solutions. Innovation in this area is not just coming from developed countries, we see more and more of these innovations coming from developing countries – in fact, 80% of all IP filed in the world today comes from Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

This ecosystems approach will also allow those who are setting up local manufacturing capabilities to not just be a center of manufacturing, but to leverage on the tremendous investment in infrastructure, skills and knowledge that this entails to themselves become centers of innovation. Let us not give people ingredients but let us help them built kitchens. Let us not just help countries receive technology and know-how, let us help them become creators of technology and know-how.

Achieving such an ambitious goal is a complex endeavor and requires collaboration across many different stakeholders.

The trilateral cooperation is one such platform, but it, perhaps, needs to involve others as well. But we do difficult things because they are difficult – to quote JFK – and complex problems require cross-cutting expertise and solutions.

That is why I am very pleased that once again, our three agencies are coming together today and giving us the opportunity to draw on expertise, on networks and our desire, through the Trilateral Technical Assistance Platform, to strengthen Member States not just around local manufacturing capabilities but in all the different things needed to make health care more accessible and more equitable.

By working across our three agencies, we can also help today's issues feature prominently during the 4th High Level Meeting on NCDs next September.

In conclusion, partnerships and collaborations to deliver concrete, visible and impactful outcomes has been and will continue to be a hallmark of our trilateral work. We thank Member States and all our stakeholders for your support of this way of working, and we are grateful that our collaboration has become a powerful and influential example of cross-sectoral and inter-agency cooperation.

Lastly, since we are the end of the year, let me wish you all happy holidays, take a good break, and I wish you all the very best for 2025.

Thank you.