

**WTO Joint Statement Initiative on E-commerce: Statement by
Ministers of Australia, Japan and Singapore
20 January 2023**

The rapid digitalisation of the economy has reinforced the importance of the Joint Statement Initiative on E-Commerce (JSI). According to the World Economic Forum, an estimated 70% of new value created in the economy over the next decade will be based on digitally enabled platform business models. The digital economy continues to grow strongly despite inflationary pressures, the highly challenging geopolitical environment, and the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is changing the way businesses and consumers engage with each other, as well as the nature and modality of trade. Hence, international trade rules must reflect these new business realities and provide opportunities for countries across the development spectrum to benefit from the global digital economy.

We the co-convenors of the JSI and its participants reaffirm our commitment to establish a set of high-standard rules to govern the global digital economy. This JSI will make a critical contribution to update the WTO rulebook and reinvigorate the WTO's negotiating function.

Momentum is continuing to build in the JSI negotiation. In December 2022, we issued a streamlined consolidated text with convergence on ten articles *viz.* paperless trading, electronic contracts, electronic authentication and electronic signatures, unsolicited commercial electronic messages, online consumer protection, open government data, open internet access, transparency, cybersecurity, and electronic transactions frameworks. Participants exercised flexibility and compromise to achieve convergence on these issues.

Participants of the JSI have committed to intensify negotiations moving forward. New small negotiating groups have been formed, including on privacy and ICT products that use cryptography, and made good progress. We have also initiated discussions on horizontal issues such as general provisions dealing with preambles, definitions and principles. In addition, we will continue to strive towards greater convergence on provisions that enable and promote the flow of data, such as cross-border data flows, data localisation, and source code, and hope to reach an agreement on a permanent ban on customs duties on electronic transmissions. All of these issues are key to high standard and commercially meaningful outcomes.

We are committed to ensuring that the JSI remains balanced, inclusive and meaningful to consumers and businesses alike. The JSI has grown in membership over time, from 71 participants when it was first launched in 2019, to 87 today which account for more than 90 per cent of global trade and represent all major geographical regions and levels of development. The broad adoption of the initiative's high-standard rules and its significant coverage of the global economy will create greater certainty and interoperability amidst an increasingly fragmented digital regulatory landscape. We continue to encourage more WTO Members to participate in the JSI in order to further expand its benefits.

While the digital economy can play an important role in generating economic growth, including through reducing costs, improving productivity, and enhancing access to overseas markets, we recognise that least developed countries (LDCs) and developing Members face challenges which could limit their access to the benefits offered by the digital economy. To support these Members, we are working with stakeholders to promote digital inclusion under the E-Commerce Capacity Building Framework.

We look forward to working with all participating Members as we work towards substantial conclusion by end of 2023.

The Hon Tim Ayers, Assistant Minister for Trade, Australia

H.E. Mr HAYASHI Yoshimasa, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Japan

H.E. Mr NISHIMURA Yasutoshi, Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry, Japan

H.E. Mr Gan Kim Yong, Minister for Trade and Industry, Singapore