

CHINA ROUND TABLE

13TH CHINA ROUND TABLE ON WTO ACCESSIONS

ADVANCING ARAB ECONOMIES: FROM STRATEGIC ACCESSIONS TO
GLOBAL TRADE INTEGRATION THROUGH PRIVATE-PUBLIC PARTNERSHIP

Programme

Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, 12-14 May 2025 (TBC)



The 13th China Round Table is funded by the Government of China and organized by the WTO Secretariat, as part of the agreed activities under the China-WTO MOU¹.

For questions and inquiries on the Round Table, please contact:

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Venue: Oman Exhibition and Convention Centre

¹ In July 2011, the Government of the People's Republic of China signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the WTO Secretariat on the China's LDCs and Accessions Programme ("The China Programme"). The Programme has been extended on a yearly basis, with the latest signed in December 2022. The China Programme has five pillars, including the WTO Accessions Internship Programme and the annual Accession Round Table, designed to build capacity and technical skills in trade policy, including on accession negotiations, for acceding governments and Article XII Members, especially from least-developed countries.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The [China Round Table \(CRT\)](#) is an annual high-level gathering of acceding governments and Members of the World Trade Organization (WTO) interested in accession to discuss the integration of new Members in the rules-based multilateral trading system. Since the first Round Table ([CRT-1](#)) was held in Beijing, China in 2012, eleven more have been held in various locations around the world, including on the margins of the WTO Ministerial Conferences (MCs). These include: [CRT-2](#) in Luang Prabang, Lao PDR (2013); [CRT-3](#) in Dushanbe, Tajikistan (2015); [CRT-4](#) in Nairobi, Kenya (2015), on the margins of MC10; [CRT-5](#) in Siem Reap, Cambodia (2017); [CRT-6](#) in Buenos Aires, Argentina (2017) on the margins of MC11; [CRT-7](#) in Astana, Kazakhstan (2018); [CRT-8](#) in Moscow, Russian Federation (2019); [CRT-9](#) in Geneva, Switzerland (2020), [CRT-10](#) in a virtual format (2022); [CRT-11](#) in Vientiane, Lao PDR (2023); and [CRT-12](#) in Abu Dhabi (2024). Various topics have been covered in Round Table discussions, ranging from systemic contributions that WTO accessions make in strengthening the multilateral trading system to experience sharing on best practices on WTO accession and post-accession, especially for LDCs or with a regional focus.

The Arab region is one of the most under-represented in the WTO. Of the 22 members of the Arab League, only 14 are WTO Members and eight are observers of different types. Out of the 14 Members, the Union of the Comoros, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the Sultanate of Oman, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Yemen joined the WTO through the accession process pursuant to Article XII of the Agreement Establishing the WTO (the Marrakesh Agreement) between 2000 and 2024. Today, Algeria, Iraq, Lebanese Republic, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic are in the process of Article XII accession, while Palestine has had an ad hoc observer status in the WTO Ministerial Conferences since 2005. The seven Arab acceding governments have been pursuing accession, on average, for approximately 20 years, with some of the accession processes being inactive for a long time. It is worthy to note that Comoros joined the WTO as its 165th Member in August 2024.

Following CRT-12 in Abu Dhabi, the first Round Table organized in the Arab region, the 13th China Round Table (CRT-13) will convene on **12-14 May 2025 in Muscat, Sultanate of Oman**. This event, building on the achievements and outcomes of the previous round table, including the Arab Study, will further delve into Arab perspectives on WTO accessions and the multilateral trading system, with particular insights from Member States of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)², all of which are either Original Members or Article XII Members. The CRT-13 aims to leverage the momentum and insights gained to support Arab acceding governments in navigating the accession process, utilizing WTO membership to foster economic policy coherence, and achieving economic growth and development through accelerated accession. The focus of this Round Table will be *Advancing Arab Economies: From Strategic Accessions to Trade Integration Through Private – Public Partnerships*. Additionally, with the recent accession of Comoros and active efforts by other Arab nations, there is some momentum toward greater WTO representation for the region. This round table will explore post-accession progress and how such experiences can inform the strategies of other acceding countries.

Against this background, the 13th China Round Table will aim to:

- Commemorate Oman's 25th Anniversary of WTO Membership
- Evaluate the efforts in implementing recommendations from the Arab Study and its subsequent impact in facilitating Arab countries' WTO accession efforts.
- Assess the role of regional Arab integration for Arab acceding governments as a stepping stone to WTO membership.
- Examine the role played by the private sector in advancing Arab accessions.
- Draw from the experiences of Arab Members to outline practical steps for acceding governments, emphasizing economic policy coherence and how to best utilize WTO membership for economic growth and diversification.

² Kingdom of Bahrain, State of Kuwait, Sultanate of Oman, State of Qatar, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates.

- Organize a special event on Trade for Peace: Omani Perspectives on Prioritizing Accessions During Times of Conflict and Regional Instability.

DRAFT PROGRAMME

DAY 1 – Monday, 12 May 2025	
OPENING SESSION	
9:00 – 9:30	Registration
9:30 – 10:15	<p>Opening Ceremony Moderator: Ms. Maika Oshikawa, Director, Accessions Division, WTO Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amb. Xiangchen Zhang, Deputy Director General, WTO (TBC) • H.E. Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Secretary General, Arab League (TBC) • H.E. Ambassador LI Chenggang, Permanent Representative of China to the WTO (TBC) • H.E. Qais bin Mohammed Al Yousef, Minister, Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion, Oman (TBC) • Official Opening of the 13th China Round Table, H.E. Jasem Al Budaiwi, Secretary-General, GCC (TBC)
10:15 – 10:30	Signing Ceremony of the Renewal of the China-WTO Memorandum of Understanding on "China's LDCs and Accessions Programme"
10:30 – 11:00	Coffee Break
HIGH LEVEL SESSION: COMMEMORATING OMAN'S 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF WTO MEMBERSHIP	
<p>This panel session aims to commemorate Oman's 25th Anniversary of WTO Membership and share experiences with other Article XII Members and Acceding Governments. The event will also feature the launch of a study analyzing Oman's economic performance since its accession, with a focus on trade policy reforms, diversification efforts, and participation in the multilateral trading system.</p>	
11:00-12:30	<p>Moderator: Mr. Faisal Al-Hinai Deputy Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman to the WTO, Permanent Mission of Oman to the UN and other international organizations Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • H.E. Qais bin Mohammed Al-Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Sultanate of Oman (TBC) • H.E. Pankaj Khimji, Advisor for Foreign Trade and International Cooperation in the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion (TBC) • Ambassador Peter Allgeier, Former US Deputy Trade Representative (TBC) <p>Special remarks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • H.E. Sheikh Abdulaziz Al Hinai, Former Ambassador of Oman to the UK (TBC) • Mr. Azzan Al Busaidi, Undersecretary, Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (TBC) • H.E. Sheikh Khalifa Al Harthy, Undersecretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (TBC) <p><i>Followed by open discussion</i></p>
12:30-14:00	Lunch Break

SESSION 1: ADVANCING ARAB ACCESSIONS: BEST PRACTICES AND INSIGHTS FROM THE GULF

This panel session explores the critical role that Gulf countries play in supporting and mentoring Arab nations on their path to WTO accession. It will delve into the successful strategies and reforms implemented by Gulf states, both Article XII and Original Members, that have enabled their effective integration into the global trading system. The discussion will highlight how these countries have utilized their WTO memberships to foster economic diversification, implement regulatory reforms, and enhance trade capabilities.

14:00-15:30	<p>Moderator: Dr. Mena Hassan, Counsellor, Accessions Division, WTO</p> <p>Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• H.E. Ambassador Saqr AlMoqbel, Permanent Representative, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Chair of Arab Group (TBC)• Representatives from Arab Article XII Members: Jordan, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Yemen• Representatives from Original Members: Kuwait, Qatar, and Bahrain• Representatives from Arab acceding governments: Algeria, Comoros, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and MC13 Observer: Palestine <p><i>Followed by open discussion</i></p>
15:30-16:00	Reception

DAY 2 – Tuesday, 13 May 2025

SESSION 3: ARAB ACCESSIONS AND POST WTO ACCESSION STRATEGIES

This session will examine the process of WTO accession for Arab countries, with a focus on the post-accession phase and its significance for fully integrating into the global trading system. It will address key challenges, such as implementing WTO commitments, and the importance of technical assistance and capacity-building in supporting these efforts. The discussion will highlight strategies for effective implementation and monitoring, while also considering the role of development partners in facilitating these processes. Finally, the session will explore how WTO membership can influence intra-Arab trade and economic cooperation, offering insights for other Arab countries and least developed countries (LDCs) seeking accession.

8:30 – 10:00	<p>Moderator: Mr. Maika Oshikawa, Director, Accessions Division, WTO</p> <p>Opening remarks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Representative from the World Bank• Representative from the IMF• Representative from the Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF)• Represent
10:00- 10:30	Coffee Break

SESSION 4:

ENHANCING REGIONAL INTEGRATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST: PATHWAYS TO ECONOMIC COOPERATION AND TRADE EXPANSION

This session will examine the role of regional integration in advancing economic cooperation, trade diversification, and sustainable growth in the Middle East. The discussion will focus on how regional frameworks and agreements can facilitate greater economic interdependence among Arab states while addressing key challenges, such as trade barriers and regulatory alignment. Drawing on the experiences of both Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members and broader regional stakeholders, the session will highlight approaches to deepen economic ties, strengthen trade facilitation, and integrate Arab economies into global value chains.

10:30-12:30	<p>Moderator: Dr. Mena Hassan, Counsellor, Accessions Division, WTO</p> <p>Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dr. Ahmed Nizar Jamel, Director of Arab Economic Integration Department, Arab League• H.E. Jasem Al Budaiwi, Secretary-General, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)• Mr. Faisal Al-Hinai Deputy Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman to the WTO, Permanent Mission of Oman to the UN and other international organizations <p><i>Followed by open discussion.</i></p>
12:30 – 14:00	Lunch

SESSION 5: WHAT'S NEXT? ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF THE ARAB STUDY

Presented at the 12th China Round Table on the margins of MC13 in Abu Dhabi, the Arab Study is the result of an in-depth research on how different Arab Article XII and original members could be an exemplary to Arab acceding governments, as well as the importance of technical assistance and capacity building in harvesting the full benefits of WTO membership. The panel will assess the progress made in translating the Arab Study's findings into tangible support mechanisms and identify areas where further efforts are required. By engaging directly with these institutions, the session aims to explore the successes and challenges in building capacities and facilitating technical assistance that can propel Arab states toward full integration into the multilateral trading system.

14:00 – 15:30	<p>Moderator: Ms. Maika Oshikawa, Director, Accessions Division, WTO</p> <p>Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mr. Nazar Mohamed Eltahir Diab, Senior Regional Integration Specialist, Cooperation and Capacity Development Department, Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) (TBC)• Ms. Latifa Elbouabdellaoui, Director-General, Islamic Center for Development of Trade (ICDT) (TBC)• Dr. Abdelkrim Guendouz, Senior Economist and Studies and Statistics Division Chief, Economic Department, Arab Monetary Fund (AMF) (TBC)• Dr. Linda F. Kassem, Director, Digital Strategy and Transformation, PwC Middle East (TBC)• Hamid Mamdouh, Senior Legal Counsel, King & Spalding LLP (TBC) <p><i>Followed by open discussion.</i></p>
15:30 – 16:00	Coffee break

DAY 3 – Wednesday, 14 May 2025

SESSION 6: THE PRIVATE SECTOR'S ROLE IN ARAB WTO INTEGRATION

The extent and mechanisms of private sector engagement in the accession process vary across the Arab region. This panel seeks to identify best practices and lessons learned from successful private sector involvements, aiming to provide actionable insights for countries still on the path to WTO membership. It will explore how the private sector can serve as a catalyst for economic reform, leverage investment in trade-related infrastructure, and foster an ecosystem conducive to sustainable economic growth and diversification in the Arab world. Panelists will explore mechanisms for effective public-private partnerships, capacity building for trade-related infrastructure, and the enhancement of trade facilitation measures that align with WTO rules.

8:30 – 10:00

Moderator: Dr. Mena Hassan, Counsellor, Accessions Division, WTO

Speakers:

- Hilda Al Hinai, Secretary General, Arab – Swiss Chamber of Commerce and Industry (TBC)
- Dr. Khaled Hanafy, Secretary General, Union of Arab Chambers (TBC)
- Dr. Yousuf Hamad Al Balushi, Former Chief Economist, Supreme Council of Development and Planning of Oman

SESSION 7: EMPOWERING ARAB ECONOMIC GROWTH THROUGH TRADE FACILITATION: STRATEGIES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The Arab region, with its strategic geographical positioning and rich natural resources, holds immense potential for economic integration and diversification. However, intra-regional trade remains underexploited due to a variety of trade barriers and inefficient customs procedures. This panel aims to focus on the transformative potential of enhanced trade facilitation within the Arab world, examining how streamlined trade processes can boost intra-Arab trade, spur economic growth, and support diversification efforts away from traditional oil-based economies. Experts will discuss the implementation of effective trade facilitation measures, including customs modernization, the adoption of digital trade tools, and regulatory harmonization across Arab countries.

10:00 – 12:30

Moderator:

Speakers:

- Mr. Pierre Sauvé, Senior Trade Specialist, Global Trade and Regional Integration, World Bank (TBC)
- Mr. Taisuke Ito, Chief, Trading Systems Section, Trading Systems, Services and Creative Economy Branch, Division on International Trade and Commodities the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) (TBC)
- Ms. Devika Rajeev, Associate Programme Officer, Trade Policy Trade Facilitation and Policy for Business, Division of Market Development, International Trade Centre (ITC) (TBC)

12:30 – 14:00

Lunch

SPECIAL EVENT:

TRADE FOR PEACE: OMANI PERSPECTIVES ON PRIORITIZING ACCESSIONS DURING TIMES OF CONFLICT AND REGIONAL INSTABILITY

This panel will explore how Oman leverages its strategic position and diplomatic relations to promote peace and stability in the Middle East through trade. The discussion will focus on Oman's role as a mediator in regional conflicts and how its trade policies have been designed to not only boost economic growth but also to foster better relations with neighbouring countries. The panel will highlight specific examples where Omani trade initiatives have contributed to conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts, underscoring the potential of trade as a tool for peace in volatile regions. This session will also provide insights into the synergies between the

benefits of WTO accession, economic strategies, and diplomatic objectives, offering a unique perspective on the intersection of trade and peace.

14:00 – 16:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Moderator: Prof. Achim Wennmann, Professor of Practice, IHEID (TBC) <p>Speakers :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• HH Sayyid Dr. Adham Al Said, Founder, The Firm for Business and Economic Consulting; Assistant Professor, Sultan Qaboos University (TBC)• Mr. Alan Wolff, former Deputy Director-General, WTO (TBC)• Dr. Abdullah Baabood, Visiting professor at the Faculty of International Research and Education, Waseda University (TBC)• Sheikh Khalifa Ali Al Harthy, Undersecretary of the Foreign Ministry for Political Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (TBC) <p>Commentator:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dr. Patrick Low, former Chief Economist, WTO (TBC)
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CONCLUDING REMARKS

16:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ms Maika Oshikawa, Director, Accessions Division, WTO.• Representative from the Sultanate of Oman
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