

Brazil Wants South Agenda to Dominate Doha's G-77 Meeting

Contributed by Alexandre Rocha
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The reform of the United Nations (UN) and negotiations at the World Trade Organization (WTO) should dominate the 2nd Southern Summit, to take place in Doha, the capital of Qatar, between June 12 and 16.

This is the belief of ambassador Rubens Ricupero, former secretary general of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (Unctad) and current director of the Economy School at Armando Álvares Penteado College (FAAP), in São Paulo, in southeastern Brazil.

To him, the main challenge of those participating in the meeting will be managing to put themes connected to development at the top of the agenda of both processes.

"It is fundamental for developing countries not to have a passive attitude," he said. The meeting in the Arab country is going to bring together the 132 current members of the G-77 and China.

The G-77 operates under the umbrella of the UN and has as its main objectives articulation and promotion of the common interests of developing countries.

With regard to the reform of the UN, Ricupero stated that it is essential that developing countries manage to attract the necessary attention to questions like the fight against poverty, hunger and AIDS, the volatility of international capita and the equilibrium of world trade, so that they may be placed side by side with themes like the fight against terrorism.

"It is important for the G-77 summit to show that it is not possible to separate themes connected to safety from those related to economic development," declared the ambassador.

"If not, the agenda will be dominated by themes of interest to the rich countries, with a more political point of view," he added.

The reforms will be discussed during the General Assembly meeting in September. According to Ricupero, apart from the proposal for expansion of the Security Council defended by various countries, including Brazil, the creation of a Social and Economic Development Council with more ample powers than the current Social and Economic Council would answer to the interests of developing nations.

According to him, the idea is for the organization also to have power to coordinate the activities of organizations that are not part of the UN, "but that operate in its system in a more ample sense," like the International Monetary Fund IMF, the World Bank (IRBD) and the WTO itself.

"Mainly with the objective of reaching the Millennium Declaration targets," stated Ricupero, referring to the UN document that addresses, among other themes, the reduction of world poverty to half the 2000 levels by 2015.

According to information supplied by the Brazilian Foreign Office (Itamaraty), the Millennium Goals will also be the central theme in the G-77 summit.

From the meeting, three documents will be released: a political declaration, an implementation plan for the measures defined at the 1st Southern Summit, which took place in Havana in 2000, and a report regarding the group's operation executed by the South Centre organization, based in Geneva.

Conclusion of the Doha Rounds

Ricupero recalled that with the recent election of Frenchman Pascal Lamy to the position of secretary general of the WTO, all the main international economic institutions are being led by representatives of developed countries, as is the case with the IMF, whose director general is the Spanish Rodrigo Rato, and of the IRBD, whose elected president is the north American Paul Wolfowitz, an ally of the US president George W. Bush.

"In terms of governance, the representation of developing countries has diminished," stated Ricupero.

In this respect, he stated that the members of the G-77 must articulate themselves for concrete proposals not only in the scope of the UN, but also in the current negotiation rounds at the WTO, which started in 2001, also in Doha.

"This year, what there is of most concrete in the economic area, is the possibility of conclusion of the rounds and the hope of having at least the general lines of a possible agreement.

"And it is necessary to make development questions more central, so that the rounds may stand up to their name," he said, referring to the fact that the negotiations started in Qatar are also called "development rounds".

This, in his evaluation, consists on putting in the WTO agreement, for example, themes related to agricultural trade, like the elimination of subsidies offered by rich countries to their producers and exporters and the guarantee of access by farmers from developing countries to these markets.

In the industrial area, Ricupero stated that the WTO must condemn abusive tariffs applied to products in sectors considered "sensitive" and excesses in expansion of antidumping measures.

Force

But do developing countries have strength to place these themes at the top of the foreign agenda?

Ricupero believes they do and gives examples like the G-20, the group of nations that was established just before the WTO meeting in Cancún, in 2003, and managed to temporarily bar the pretension of rich countries in negotiations regarding the Agricultural sector.

He also recalled that, in the case of the UN, the G-77 represents 132 of the 191 countries in the organization that logically have weight in the decisions taken by the Assembly General.

"In case the G-77 organizes good coordination and an adequate platform, the group may do very significant things," he declared.

In this sense, he believes that the Summit of South American - Arab Countries, which took place in Brazilian capital Brasília on May 10 and 11, will have a positive influence on the meeting in Qatar.

To Ricupero, countries from both regions are going to the meeting in Qatar with articulated positions in various areas.

"The Brasília summit was very useful and was more successful than could have been imagined. It will certainly contribute to the success of the meeting in Qatar," he declared.

The final declaration of the Brasília meeting itself "emphasizes the importance of active participation by leaders" in the event to take place in Qatar, "which may result in the strengthening of South-South cooperation in various areas."

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