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## **ASIA PACIFIC SERVICES BUSINESSES ECHO THE CALL FOR GREATER APEC PARTICIPATION IN THE WTO AGREEMENT ON E-COMMERCE**

The Asia-Pacific Services Coalition (APSC) welcomes the significant region-wide convergence achieved in the WTO Joint Statement Initiative (JSI) negotiations on E-Commerce among developed and developing economies. We commend the parties for delivering an important set of provisions that have value in and of themselves, as well as serve as a building block for further anticipated negotiations on digital trade. This vital step forward will promote the growth of e-commerce in a manner that benefits participants at all levels of development, especially MSMEs. It delivers for both businesses and workers, and in particular, for consumers, building trust in digital transactions including protection of personal data.

The OECD's initial estimates of the reduction in global trade costs associated with the new WTO E-commerce Agreement, when implemented, suggest an increase in global digital market opening of 30 percent. This would make a fundamental difference for MSMEs in the region.

At their recent meeting in Tokyo, the APEC Business Advisory Council (ABAC) urged APEC economies to join the new WTO agreement. Digital services businesses can only reach their full competitive potential if the spirit and intent of this initiative is realized. We therefore echo the call for all APEC economies to bring their domestic consultations and clarification processes to an expeditious conclusion and join their regional partners in celebrating the world's first inclusive global benchmark set of digital trade disciplines.

For business, a key benefit lies in the agreement among the parties not to impose tariffs on electronic transactions. Commercial benefits will also flow from trade facilitation provisions to enhance paperless trade and interoperability, including in e-invoicing and e-authentication, and to encourage a higher level of digital regulatory cooperation and international digital standards development. The agreement sets out the first global trade provisions designed to facilitate e-payments, which have become a key driver of international trade. Importantly, regional services businesses look forward to the built-in review of the current text of the agreement, and the possibility of extending the provisions to cover issues that remain to be resolved as the digital economy evolves, including core data flow issues, data localization and source code.

We also call on APEC Ministers to work together to achieve rapid incorporation of this agreement into the WTO system to ensure the agreement has global reach. This step is essential if the WTO is to regain business credibility and maintain relevance in the digital age. Delay in docking the agreement into the WTO system could also delay the implementation at domestic level of digital regulatory reforms and slow delivery of the anticipated productivity gains. APEC members need a united approach to confront these challenges in the interests of meeting our regional targets in the APEC Services Competitiveness Roadmap (ASCR).

APSC members have been strong advocates of the WTO JSI negotiations on e-commerce since they began five years ago. At the level of the business community, we retain our collective ambitions for global digital trade governance. We call on APEC Leaders to show the same collective purpose to help embed the new Agreement on Electronic Commerce into the WTO. We also urge APEC to consider implementation of this valuable set of disciplines, as well as the need for APEC members to continue to prepare for any follow-on negotiations, as necessary elements in the design and development of a New Services Agenda with the ASCR set to culminate in 2025.

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*Launched in Cebu, Philippines in 2015, the Asia Pacific Services Coalition (APSC) – composed of the major business organizations focused on services in the Asia Pacific region – agreed to develop closer cooperation and dialogue aimed at fostering growth and efficiency in the services sector.*

*APSC was recognized by the APEC Leaders in the 2016 Lima Declaration as a key player in the development of the APEC Services Competitiveness Roadmap (ASCR), a ten-year strategic plan with identified individual and collective action points to increase APEC competitiveness in the services sector. The Leaders encouraged further collaboration with organizations engaged in implementation and monitoring progress of the Roadmap to complete its objectives by 2025.*

**For media enquiries and further information, please contact:**

PATRICK CHUA, Asia Pacific Services Coalition: [patrick.chua@mbc.com.ph](mailto:patrick.chua@mbc.com.ph) | +63 920 978 8404

JANE DRAKE-BROCKMAN, Australian Services Roundtable:  
[exec@australianservicesroundtable.com.au](mailto:exec@australianservicesroundtable.com.au) | +61 497 679 917

JASON LEE, Singapore Business Federation: [jason.lee@sbf.org.sg](mailto:jason.lee@sbf.org.sg) | +65 9863 5167

DEVI ARIYANI, Indonesia Services Dialogue: [Devi.ariyani@isd-indonesia.org](mailto:Devi.ariyani@isd-indonesia.org) | +62 815 1820 563

LOUISA SU, Coalition of Service Industries, Chinese Taipei: [louisa@twcsi.org.tw](mailto:louisa@twcsi.org.tw) | +88 6932902 500

DORIS FUNG, Hong Kong Coalition of Services Industries: [dfung@chamber.org.hk](mailto:dfung@chamber.org.hk) | +852 2823 1268

CHRISTINE BLISS, US Coalition of Services Industries: [bliss@uscisi.org](mailto:bliss@uscisi.org) | +1 301 801 5824

JOSHUA TAN, Business New Zealand: [jtan@businessnz.org.nz](mailto:jtan@businessnz.org.nz) | +64 27 714 5999

CHOO KOK BENG, Malaysian Service Providers' Confederation: [kbchoo@yahoo.com](mailto:kbchoo@yahoo.com) | +6012 3713710