

Singapore Government

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SPEECH BY PROFESSOR TOMMY KOH, SINGAPORE'S AMBASSADOR-AT-LARGE, AT THE THIRD PLENARY MEETING FOR US-SINGAPORE FREE TRADE AGREEMENT NEGOTIATIONS, HELD ON 14 DECEMBER 2000, 4.00 PM (EASTERN TIME) IN WASHINGTON DC, USA

Statement of the Singapore Delegation

We have come close to the end of the second week of our three-week long negotiations. I wish to make three points this afternoon.

First, I am pleased to note that, formally or informally, our colleagues in the 15 negotiating groups have had the opportunity to meet. They have held substantive and useful discussions. In some cases, the negotiating groups have progressed from the general exchange of views to the exchange of negotiating texts. We have made progress although I must confess that we have not made as much progress as the Singapore delegation had hoped. Singaporeans are an impatient people. We would have liked to move at a faster pace but we understand that you are unable to do so because of your need to consult other agencies, representatives of industry and key members of Congress.

Second, we note that in a speech at lunch yesterday, the Deputy USTR, Ambassador Richard Fischer said that it might not be possible to wrap up the USSFTA before the end of the year. Ambassador Fischer emphasized the importance of securing a good agreement. We also understand that the USTR intends to extend the deadline for responses to the Federal Register, on the USSFTA, from 19 December 2000 to 5 January 2001. The Singapore delegation's response to these developments is that we should press on and not ease off. We should try to get as much done as we can before we adjourn on 22 December. We should therefore encourage all the negotiating groups to submit texts.

The two chief negotiators should meet tomorrow afternoon to review the texts on the table and to consolidate them into a single negotiating text. We can use brackets to indicate texts which do not enjoy consensus.

Third, I would like to suggest the following work programme for the third and final week for your consideration. I suggest that the negotiating groups should continue to meet on 18, 19 and 20 December. I suggest that 21 and 22 December should be devoted to plenary meetings. The two chief negotiators should attempt to resolve as many outstanding issues as possible. I hope that when we adjourn on 22 December, we will have a single text with very few brackets. This will enable us to resume our negotiations next year and enhance our prospects of securing a good agreement.

RELEASED BY: Singapore Embassy in Washington DC
DATE: 14 December 2000

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