

**EAST ASIAN INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC LAW & POLICY PROGRAMME
ASIAN INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL LAW
FACULTY OF LAW, UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG**

Public Lecture

**Can International Trade Negotiations at the
WTO Ever Succeed?**

After ten years of the Doha Round, nothing has been achieved. Is it time to give up?

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**Tuesday, 22 November 2011, 6:45 pm – 8:00 pm
Room 726, 7/F Knowles Building, University of Hong Kong**

Chair: Professor C.L. Lim

The “Doha Round” of international trade negotiations at the World Trade Organization were launched in 2001, coincidentally at the same time as China joined the WTO. The Round comprises a very broad range of negotiations on subjects including agriculture, customs duties on industrial goods, trade in services, trade facilitation, trade rules on anti-dumping and other matters, and some aspects of the relationship between trade and environmental issues. These and other subjects are joined together in a “single undertaking” so that nothing can be agreed until everything is agreed. Ten years of strenuous efforts have produced progress but no result. Meanwhile the economic backdrop against which the negotiations are taking place is much changed from 2001. Major emerging market economies such as China, India and Brazil have developed rapidly. Successive financial and economic crises have racked the developed world, in which the balance of public opinion has turned against trade liberalization. In these circumstances it is argued by a number of analysts that the Doha agenda is out of date and has been overtaken by events. The WTO should develop a new negotiating agenda and a simpler way of conducting negotiations, abandoning the “single undertaking” approach. The WTO will hold its Eighth Ministerial Conference in Geneva in December. Member governments of the WTO, generally speaking, remain committed to Doha but are aware that, in order to restore credibility, the Organization has to demonstrate its effectiveness and relevance in the 21st Century. Many of the Doha subjects indeed remain relevant in the 21st Century and would feature in any new negotiating agenda even if Doha were abandoned. The WTO is the bedrock of the international trading system and has shown its worth in moderating the rise of protectionism in recent difficult economic times. It is perhaps too much to expect an organization with a near-universal and highly diverse membership to blaze a trail of new trade liberalization. Nevertheless, the world needs the WTO more than ever. A way needs to be found of combining a more results-oriented approach to Doha with a forward-looking agenda and new work programme.

Stuart Harbinson had a distinguished career in public service in Hong Kong. From 1994 to 2002 he represented Hong Kong, and then the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of China, in the WTO in Geneva. He subsequently joined the WTO Secretariat as Chief of Staff to Director-General Dr Supachai Panitchpakdi and then became Senior Adviser to Director-General Pascal Lamy. He subsequently worked in the UNCTAD Secretariat in Geneva. He has rich experience as a former Chairman of a number of WTO bodies, including the TRIPS and Services Councils, and the Dispute Settlement Body. He was Chairman of the WTO’s overarching body, the General Council (2001/2) overseeing preparations for the launch of the Doha round, and of the negotiating group handling the formative stages of the Doha negotiations on agriculture (2002/4). Stuart has also chaired a number of WTO dispute settlement panels.

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