

# WTO to be led by a woman for first time

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The World Trade Organization announced Thursday that South Korea's trade minister and a Harvard-trained former Nigerian finance minister have qualified as the two finalists to become the next director-general, ensuring a woman in the top job for the first time.

A selection committee said that Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala of Nigeria and Yoo Myung-hee of South Korea qualified for the final round in a race expected to end in the coming weeks. They were picked out of a pool of five candidates.

## **Key Highlights**

- The Geneva-based WTO's General Council, made up of envoys from the 164-member body, eliminated Amina Mohamed, a former trade minister from Kenya; Mohammad Maziad Al-Tuwaijri, a Saudi former economy minister, and British former International Trade Secretary and Brexit proponent Liam Fox.
- The previous WTO director-general, Roberto Azevedo of Brazil, made a surprise announcement in May that he would leave the job a year early, citing a personal decision. He left without a successor on August 31.

- Azevedo's seven-year tenure was marked by intense pressure from the U.S. President Donald Trump, who repeatedly accused the WTO of unfair treatment of the U.S. and started a trade war with China in defiance of the WTO system. In the past, Trump has threatened to pull the United States out of the trade body altogether.
- The WTO's dispute settlement system is perhaps the world's best-known venue for resolving international trade disputes – such as those pitting plane-makers Boeing and Airbus in recent decades. But the United States has clogged up the dispute settlement machinery by blocking any new members for its highest court, the Appellate Body, which has been unable to address new disputes since last year.
- The next director-general will face the daunting task of keeping the United States on board if Trump wins a second term, amid Washington's allegations that China is engaged in unfair practices such as excessively subsidizing industries and stealing intellectual property notably at the expense of Western businesses hoping to tap the expanding Chinese market. China rejects the allegations.
- The WTO, which was created in 1995 out of the former General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, has never had a woman director-general or national from Africa as its leader. It operates by consensus, meaning that any single member country can block decisions.

**SOURCE:** *Business Standard*