

Trump tries to block first African candidate for WTO chief

US move could derail former Nigerian finance minister Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala's hopes of become next World Trade Organization director-general

By Lizzy Burden
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Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala

Donald Trump has dealt a blow to the first female, African candidate with a chance to run the World Trade Organization.

The US said it would not back Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, the former Nigerian finance minister, to replace Roberto Azevedo as the next director-general of the WTO.

Washington has already paralysed the organisation's role as global arbiter on trade by blocking appointments to its appeals panel. Now it threatens to render it leaderless for weeks or months.

Despite having secured the support of EU member states this week, Dr Okonjo-Iweala requires consensus among the organisation's 164 members to be appointed next month.

Harry Broadman, a trade negotiator in the Bush and Clinton administrations and managing director of the Berkeley Research Group, tweeted: "The market signal the US is sending to the rest of the world by being the lone member blocking the needed consensus for appointing the next WTO director-general is disturbing amid a global crisis. US global economic leadership continues to take a nosedive."

The WTO has called a meeting for Nov 9, less than a week after the US presidential election.

Sam Lowe, of the Centre for European Reform, said: "If Trump loses, they can just wait until he leaves and try to address these issues with an administration that is at least more amenable to compromise. If Trump wins, everything gets much more difficult."

Three WTO ambassadors, the "troika" charged with finding a successor to Mr Azevedo, had decided that the Nigerian candidate should be the next chief as she had secured wide cross-regional backing. But Washington instead supported South Korean trade minister Yoo Myung-hee.

A spokesman for Dr Okonjo-Iweala's campaign said: "A swift conclusion to the process will allow members to begin again to work, together, on the urgent challenges and priorities."

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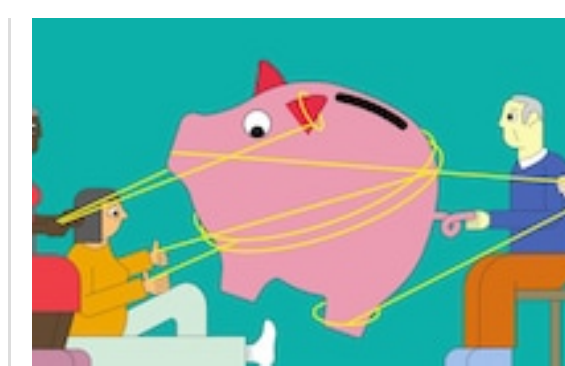
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