

US calls on China to unlock WTO trade talks

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WASHINGTON — The top US trade official said Thursday China is key to a breakthrough in World Trade Organization trade liberalization talks next week and has a "particular obligation" to make concessions.

US Trade Representative Susan Schwab noted that China's benefits from the opening of their trade system amounted to "hundreds of billion of dollars."

"China has a particular obligation to give back to the Doha Round" of WTO negotiations, she said in a news conference on the upcoming WTO talks that open Monday in Geneva.

Concerns about a flood of Chinese exports worldwide are particularly heightened in developing countries, where resistance is mounting as economies seek protection for their domestic sectors.

"China needs therefore to step up and play a leadership role," Schwab said.

China joined the WTO in December 2001, just after the launch of the Doha Round, and has seen its exports explode under the free-trade regime.

Schwab heads a team due to leave Washington Thursday for a gathering of ministers of 30 countries in Geneva aimed at salvaging the floundering Doha Round, launched nearly seven years ago in the Qatari capital.

The US trade official said she has had "good conversations" with Chinese officials recently and "likes" to think that China is willing to make a market opening contribution to achieve a successful outcome.

"Without that contribution it is impossible to imagine a successful conclusion to the Doha Round," she said.

Asked whether she thought a breakthrough could be achieved at next week's talks, Schwab said she was "cautiously optimistic."

The US team was headed to the talks with "the intent and hope and expectations that there is a deal to be had."

"I think a deal is eminently doable ... it is doable next week."