

PRESS RELEASE

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SEATTLE CONFERENCE DOOMED TO SUCCEED, SAYS MOORE

"The Seattle meeting is doomed to succeed because too much is at stake", said Director-General Moore in his opening address to the WTO's Third Ministerial Conference on 30 November. He said that the risk of further financial crises or further marginalization of the poor are already challenges on the table in Seattle "whether we put them there or not".

"A broad and balanced new trade round is in our shared interest because all of us have vital national issues at stake," said Moore. In particular, he called for the removal of trade barriers on exports of the poorest countries who face the threat of slipping further behind in the world economy.

The full text of Mr. Moore's opening address follows.

Opening Address to the WTO's 3rd Ministerial Conference
by Mike Moore, Director-General
30 November 1999

Distinguished guests:

Let me begin by paying tribute to our hosts, the United States of America, for its wisdom, leadership and strength in hosting this important conference.

Thanks are due to our chairperson, Charlene Barshefsky, who will lead us over the next few days and to the WTO Secretariat for their dedication and professionalism.

On behalf of you all, I want to thank our host city Seattle and its leaders and people. At the time no one believed this conference would attract so much attention. 50,000 guests, many of them even invited.

Ladies and gentlemen:

This conference is doomed - doomed to succeed. Despite our differences inside and outside this chamber, the WTO will succeed because it is too important to fail. Too much is at stake. It's true we faced problems in Geneva. A brick wall of "insurmountable opportunities". We were unable to get for Ministers an agreed single text. That was true of other times when we launched rounds.

The WTO is a new organization. We represent 135 sovereign governments - from every region, every culture, every stage of development. China is now poised to join us, and many other countries are waiting impatiently in line. There may be 50,000 outside the conference centre but we have 1.5 billion people wanting to join.

We all realize that no nation can now enjoy clean water, air, manage an airline, even organise a tax system or hope to contain or cure AIDS or cancer without the co-operation of others.

When the Berlin wall came down, when Nelson Mandela was freed, when the Colonels went back into their barracks, elsewhere, the world celebrated. We celebrated the universal values of political and economic freedom. No one shouted, cursed and swore about the evils of globalization then.

Every mother with a sick child wants the best the world has to offer from science, no one wants the old technology when they go to the dentist. They don't complain then about global or universal values.

I have some empathy with some of these protestors outside. Not all are bad or mad.

They are right when they say they want a safer, cleaner more healthy planet. They are correct when they call for an end to poverty, more social justice, better living standards.

They are wrong to blame the WTO for all the world's problems. They are especially wrong when they say this is not a democratic house. Ministers are here because their people decided so. Our agreements must be agreed by Parliaments. This is a Ministerial Conference.

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I know much of the so called Geneva "deadlock" is tactical. The suggestion from one developing country to hold progress on e-commerce until there is a better deal on implementation, sounds fine in Geneva. Refusing e-commerce is the modern equivalent of resisting railways, roads and electricity. The beauty of this balanced package we will work through is that everyone must win.

In Geneva, we have worked for a year and more to prepare the ground for new negotiations, and to set out our work programme for the future. Your representatives have worked extremely hard - and progress has been made.

But the fact remains that we have not bridged our differences. Three times we asked capitals for more flexibility to conclude a deal. But three times a decision was made not to give ambassadors more room. You made that decision. You made the decision that certain issues only Seattle could resolve. I understand that. You are Ministers, you were elected, so responsibility ultimately rests with you.

All of us recognize, deep down, that a broad and balanced new trade round is in our shared interest because all of us have vital national issues at stake.

Many developing countries are experiencing difficulty implementing certain WTO commitments which they want addressed before taking on new obligations. And just as important, they need greater access for their exports. These issues are especially pressing for the smallest and most vulnerable among the developing countries.

Other countries are dependent on agricultural exports - and they want the kind of access which they feel has been denied them in previous rounds. Still others want new rule-making in areas like electronic commerce, investment, competition policy, transparency in government procurement, and trade facilitation. Then there are those who believe an examination of the relationship between trade and social issues needs to be started if we are to give globalization a human face.

The concerns of the least-developed must not be left behind. What is the real cost to the wealthiest nations of dropping barriers to their exports - when these exports represent just half a per cent of world trade? If we cannot make this small concession to the poorest amongst us, what hope is there for our grand commitment to poverty eradication in the 21st century? The least-developed countries are not threatened by globalization. They are threatened by "de-globalization", falling outside of the world economy and slipping ever further behind. This is not the fault of the trading system. Governments themselves have responsibilities. Some governments are paying up to nine times more on debt repayment than on health. The heavy hand of history has its thumb on the windpipe of many member Governments.

You face a huge agenda. Some argue it should be made smaller, more manageable, less controversial. But whose interests would we advance? Whose would we ignore? And when is the right time to tackle the hard issues? Next year? Another Ministerial? Next Round? The risk of financial crises or further marginalization of the poor are not challenges that lie in some far-off future which we can contemplate in a detached or academic way. They are already with us. They are on the table in Seattle whether we put them there or not. And they demand answers.

Just consider how interconnected we are. A quarter of global output now crosses national borders - and this share is even higher for developing countries, almost 40 per cent of their GDP. Developing countries need a secure and stable world trading system as much as anyone. They need more openness, not less. Stronger rules, not weaker ones. As much as anyone, they need new trade negotiations to expand their markets, open up their own economies, and to undertake reforms. The future of the global economy lies with them. They are the customers of the future, the living

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standards of the wealthy nations will rely on purchasing power of the poorer nations in the next century.

I am optimistic. I believe that beyond our immediate differences, there is broad agreement about the kind of balanced negotiation that is needed. But I also know that mistakes can be made. Missteps or misunderstandings could still snatch defeat from the jaws of victory.

The cost of failure is high. The poor can't wait, science and technology won't wait.

To me it's a simple proposition. The first half of this century was marked by force and coercion. The next century ought to be one marked by persuasion not coercion. Of States settling their differences through that great equaliser, the law. Of a binding disputes mechanism, to settle differences, of engagement and interdependence.

I'm from a small country but I don't see what we are doing here as a threat to our sovereignty. I see interdependence as a guarantor of our sovereignty and safety. The small, the vulnerable and the poorest among our family need our organization and success in Seattle more than most.

I recall a splendid comment of Julius Nyerere who claimed that as each village's wealth once depended on its neighbour's ability to purchase, this is now true of nations. Our parents learnt from the great depression, made deeper and more lethal by rising trade barriers from which came the twin tyrannies of our age, fascism and marxism, thus war; hot and cold.

They swore it would not happen again, and they created an international architecture which included the UN, IMF, World Bank, and the GATT, now the WTO, to achieve that peaceful purpose and noble vision.

Are we as good as our parents? Can we lift our vision beyond narrow national briefs written in distant capitals?

The decision is whether we march boldly with confidence, compassion and vision into the next millennium or limp forward bogged down in a swamp of indecision paralysed by vested interests. I ask you to think of these brave men and women from the 1940's and others who most recently tore down the walls of economic and political oppression.

Reflect gently on those who have never had much anyway. Those who come here from the poorest countries, the most distant islands and valleys who simply want a chance. Not favours, but an opportunity.

If we want Seattle to fail we need do nothing at all. We can return to capitals with our interests uncontaminated by compromise. We can tell our citizens that we defended their positions to the very last line of text. But what would that mean? Would we celebrate stopping the developing countries from getting a fairer deal? That we left a more unstable and insecure world? That we stopped progress? That's the equivalent of celebrating Europe NOT enlarging. That's like celebrating a new Berlin Wall going up.

Soon a new year rises, a new century rises, a new millennium arrives. Let's welcome it with confidence. I do, because too much is at stake for us to falter, be timid or to fail.

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