

WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

WT/MIN(03)/ST/118
13 September 2003

(03-4894)

MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE
Fifth Session
Cancún, 10 - 14 September 2003

Original: French

BELGIUM

Statement by H.E. Mr Louis Michel
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs

I wish to convey to you, Mr Chairman, our gratitude and appreciation for the splendid way in which you have organized this Ministerial Conference and also the Mexican people for their warm welcome.

The objective of our Conference cannot be understood or envisaged separately from what I would call the revelations and tangible traces of a complete shift that has shattered our conventional points of reference, our beliefs and indeed our firmest convictions. It is as if a world volcano one thought was shuddering suddenly began to roar, revealing long-suppressed fears, suspected doubts that dared not be uttered, questions that would have to be answered one day when they could not be ignored any more.

Africa, the Middle East, Afghanistan, Iraq – so many conflicts that appear to be endless but clearly demonstrate the risks that are involved and grow day by day the further off the solution lies.

And I have not spoken of terrorism, the abject evil that kills all that is sacred and finest in humanity, the splendid sentiments that spring from man's heart and intelligence: tolerance, the right to be different, justice, solidarity and freedom. In a word, well-being.

To put it more simply, in my opinion, primacy must be given to political matters, in other words, to the citizen himself.

The WTO has a crucial role, a special responsibility – to conceive and implement, in the interest of all States throughout the world, a multilateral system for world trade and turn it into a tool for equitable redistribution and human development. When the world economy combines opening up markets with proper regulation, it generates growth, creates jobs, sustainable development, reduces poverty, brings predictability and shared wealth.

This is the only real answer in the long term to the frustrations that fuel conflict and violence and tragically tempt the outcasts, the young people without a future, when they give in to the devilish rabble-rousers who promise paradise in heaven but create hell on earth.

Cancún provides a privileged opportunity to move from words to deeds. Full achievement of the Doha Agenda is crucial.

The key to success is full and harmonious integration of developing countries in the multilateral system, along with the adoption of measures to boost international economic recovery.

My Government strongly reaffirms its attachment to a bold policy and welcomes the recent reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, a reform that will make a powerful contribution to the food sovereignty of the countries of the South while promoting their agricultural production and exports.

But to this end, rules need to be adopted to provide developing countries with the means for better integration in international trade.

Cancún can give a new political stimulus to something that is, in our view, a right and not an ambition.

Society in each of our countries is aware of this and, in some many ways, urges us to foil a deadly situation in which power, money and force alone have the means to dictate the rules.

The Millennium Summit, Doha, Monterrey, Johannesburg were all promising milestones, but so far they have proved to be what I would call "short-lived worldwide talk".

So long as these meetings remain idle banter, political matters will not gain the upper hand and the public interest will slip back.

Mr Ricupero, speaking on behalf of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, rightly emphasized the unique opportunity we have at this Ministerial Meeting: to bring to our societies, concerned and sometimes in disarray, the minimum of confidence needed to believe in the multilateral trading system.

An important first step was taken in the agreement on the question of access for developing countries to generic drugs. However, it is now essential to ensure prompt and effective local implementation. The populations of these countries have already been waiting too long.

Commissioner Lamy had occasion to speak about the expectations and undertakings of the European Union in regard to agriculture, market access for non-agricultural products, the Singapore issues, special and differential treatments and rules in general. Accordingly, I shall not revert to the matter.

For my part, however, I would like to insist on two factors that are, in my view, essential.

The first is that of coherence. As rightly pointed out by Mr Supachai, a development strategy means that our Organization institutionalizes synergies and actions with other international organizations. This means the political will to decompartmentalize all the major international instruments like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund or the International Labour Organization.

Surely it is time to propose the establishment of a genuine world Economic and Social Council with political power based on legitimacy and efficacy in law, on the pattern of the United Nations Security Council, but for the purpose of transparency adding, as a criterion of representativeness, the regional dimension, among others.

The fundamental referents for such a concept already exist and are embodied in some countries, including my own. I have in mind, more particularly, the basic labour rules such as the right to organize, a ban on child labour, forced labour, the right to quality jobs and environmental obligations that are vital if we are to ensure the sustainable development. I also have in mind the need to exclude services in the public interest from commerce.

The second element is technical assistance, as well as transfer of technology. Otherwise, the integration of developing countries in the WTO system is to be regarded as impossible. In this connection, the European Union's undertaking is to be welcomed.

The Belgian Government, for its part, is gratified to announce to our African colleagues a €2 million increase in its share in the Trust Fund in the context of the Doha Development Agenda. This year, our Government has already pledged €500,000, on a recurring basis. For its part, the government of Flanders has come in with €150,000, together with the €154,000 in 2002.

This Conference cannot fail to take a universal political view. Without specific, committed voluntarist lucidity, we know, indeed we realize, it will be a long time before we can offer the world what is demanded and warranted by the most elementary of human rights.

In recent months, we have all sometimes been stupefied to see the unrelenting and tragic effects of this striking gap between the uncontrolled, frightening new powers and the impotence of policy and politics to tame their excesses. The challenge at Cancún is to bring the rules of the world economy into line with the social and political rights of mankind.
