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## URUGUAY

Statement by H.E. Mr. Alvaro Ramos  
Minister of Foreign Affairs

My very first words go to the Government of Singapore to thank it for its hospitality and to express our support in producing a satisfactory outcome to this Conference.

Many delegations have pointed to the need for the Conference to adopt decisions in various sectors or to agree on starting work in the WTO on new issues.

It is Uruguay's view that, without prejudice to the treatment of these matters, before we seek new priorities for the Organization's work, solutions must be found to old issues in sectors that are vital to the majority of developing countries, such as agriculture and textiles.

In agriculture, the Agreement reached in the Uruguay Round has signified a historic change of direction. However, it has only marked the beginning of a process of reform of international agricultural trade.

Our country continues to encounter difficulties in market access.

Production subsidies, although with different instruments, are still at extremely high levels.

The recent re-introduction of export subsidies for grains brings to mind situations from the past that nobody wants to see repeated.

These practices do not necessarily involve violations of Uruguay Round commitments, but their existence clearly demonstrates the inadequacy of the commitments.

Accordingly, we consider it essential to continue the agricultural trade reform process, thereby complying with the terms of Article 20 of the Agreement on Agriculture.

Consequently, we fully support the agreement reached in the Committee on Agriculture that the preparatory stage should be initiated in 1997 for effectively embarking on negotiations in 1999.

Together with agriculture, services also call for negotiations to be initiated at the beginning of the year 2000. However, in our draft Declaration there is a marked contrast in the way in which the two issues are considered.

In the case of services, we Ministers commit ourselves to supporting a further round of negotiations, something that our country fully shares, but there is no such equivalent commitment in regard to agriculture.

To make good this omission, we firmly believe that the Conference should include in its Ministerial Declaration a clear message about the commitment of Ministers to continuing the agricultural reform process.

We wish to emphasize that, as happened in the Uruguay Round, simultaneous headway in all negotiation sectors will be a prerequisite for striking a balance between benefits and obligations that is acceptable to everyone.

Uruguay is a country that is marked by its attachment to the observance of law and to the peaceful settlement of disputes. It will, therefore, come as no surprise that we continue to pay close heed to all matters pertaining to the dispute settlement system established in the WTO.

It is gratifying to note that developing countries are turning more and more to this mechanism when they consider that their interests have been injured. It is a healthy and encouraging trend that clearly demonstrates confidence in the system's efficiency and impartiality, without which the delicate balance of benefits and obligations built up in the course of the Uruguay Round could well be lost.

The WTO has been paying special attention to economic regionalism.

I am able to affirm that Uruguay has experienced no difficulties, either theoretical or practical, in faithfully fulfilling its simultaneous commitments both in MERCOSUR and in the WTO; in contributing to the free trade agreements between MERCOSUR and other Latin American countries; in facing eventual participation in the planned Free Trade Area of the Americas and in the negotiations between MERCOSUR and the European Union to liberalize trade between both parties.

This has occurred for a very simple reason: MERCOSUR practises open regionalism.

Occasionally, some criticisms have been addressed to MERCOSUR. We respond to such opinions with incontrovertible facts: increasing trade flows, intra- and extra-MERCOSUR; trade liberalization; and the increasing interest that our subregional regime sparks among many trade partners.

We know that we are on the right path and we shall continue along it, as do other WTO Members through various mechanisms that have been set up or are in the process of being devised.

Yet we continue to be the first to defend strict compliance with Article XXIV of the GATT 1994 and of the Understanding thereon reached during the Uruguay Round and, at the same time, we shall spare no effort in supporting the work of the Committee on Regional Trade Agreements.

With reference to the "new issues" that have been proposed for inclusion in the WTO future work programme, I should state that, although many of them are not at the present time priority matters for Uruguay, we shall participate in the debates with constructive criteria and in the light of an appraisal of national interest.

This first meeting of Ministers enables us to take a look at the vast panorama opening up for the WTO in the future. The entry of the 28 countries that are in the accession process will mean that the universality of the multilateral trading system is achieved.

Our subject matter is ever broader, and the challenges are ever greater.

I would venture to describe this Conference as historic. I trust that it will be remembered as a landmark in the improvement of economic relations among the nations of the world, in the search for higher living standards, which for half a century have been the basic aim of our Governments, first made explicit in GATT and now in the WTO. In Singapore, we are engaged in the task of strengthening inescapable leadership in shaping the renewed international order that is the imperative task of the coming century.