

WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

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MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE

Third Session

Seattle, 30 November - 3 December 1999

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE EIGHTH MEETING

Held at the Conference Centre, Seattle, United States
on Friday, 3 December 1999, at 11 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Charlene Barshefsky (United States)

Subject: Adjournment of Session

The CHAIRPERSON offered her sincere thanks to and highest regard for the Director-General, the working group Chairs and Co-Chairs, the WTO Secretariat, the Deputy Directors-General, and each of the delegations representing their governments at this Ministerial Conference for their hard and productive work over the past week. She also thanked the city of Seattle, the state of Washington and the hosts in the Seattle community for their hospitality and patience during this sometimes very difficult week. Over the past four days, there had been intense discussions and negotiations on one of the core questions facing the world today – the creation of a global trading economy for the next century. The delegates had taken up profound and important issues and policy decisions, including issues that previous rounds of negotiations had not been able to resolve and matters that had not arisen previously in the trading system. They had taken up these issues with goodwill and mutual respect and had made progress on many of them. However, the issues that had arisen were diverse, highly complex and often new, and in addition, it had become clear that the WTO had outgrown the processes that had been appropriate to an earlier time. Just as issues relating to transparency might affect outside perceptions of the WTO, those same issues also had an impact on perceptions of the WTO by the Member governments themselves. There was an increasingly shared view among the Members that there was a need for a process that had a greater degree of internal transparency and was more inclusive, in order to accommodate a large and very diverse membership. Such a process had been embarked upon, and was the first ever in the GATT/WTO system to attempt to ensure the inclusion of all WTO Members. However, this process had become extremely difficult to manage and had stretched both the substantive and the procedural capability of the Ministerial Conference.

In addition, as time had passed, divergences of opinion that had long dogged the issues under discussion had remained, and while very substantial progress had been made in many areas, the issues that had remained were highly complex and could not have been resolved rapidly. Her own judgement, and in turn the judgement shared by the Director-General, the working group Chairs and Co-Chairs and the membership generally, was that it would be best to take a time-out, consult with one another, and find a creative means to finish the job. Therefore, Ministers had agreed to suspend the work of the Ministerial Conference, and to allow the Director-General time to consult with delegations in order to do the following: first and foremost, to ensure that the WTO developed rules and processes that would ensure maximum transparency for all delegations, and second, to discuss creative ways in which to bridge the remaining differences in areas where consensus did not yet exist, so that the Ministerial Conference could resume and complete its work. She noted that under the Uruguay Round Agreements, mandated negotiations in agriculture and services had to proceed

beginning in January 2000. Thus, these negotiations would commence in January in Geneva under already established WTO rules for such negotiations. She again thanked the Director-General, the Seattle community, and all of the delegations for their hard work and their active and sincere participation in the discussions during this week. It had been an honour and a privilege for her to be part of this process and she looked forward to its continuation in the weeks and months ahead.

The DIRECTOR-GENERAL paid tribute to the Chairperson for her work and dedication over the past few days, to the Ministers and Ambassadors, and to the dedicated staff of the WTO Secretariat. A record number of Ministers from all over the world – from the small island countries to the great democracies – had attended this Conference, representing probably more than a billion voters. They had come to try to put together a package that would advance living standards in their own countries and provide more justice elsewhere. This Conference in Seattle had been a first, as it had been an assembly of legislators from dozens of parliaments, all interested in what was happening. In the end the votes in their respective congresses and parliaments would decide on the fortunes of this institution. It had been a remarkable meeting, and the considerable work that had been done would be built on and not lost. The hard work that had started and was yet to be finished would continue, and the WTO would never turn its back on the least-developed countries. To the Ministers of those Members, and to the Governments and parliaments they would return to, he expressed his thanks.

The decision to take a time-out had been based on the judgement of the team. He noted that this was not the first time a Ministerial Conference had run into difficult and complex issues that had necessitated such a time-out, and the present issues were as complex as the world itself. In addition, as the Chairperson had said, there was a serious institutional challenge. The WTO serviced the governments that drove it and was owned by those governments, and any package would have to be ratified and agreed by their respective parliaments and congresses. In addition, there was a built-in agenda and a mandate to continue doing some of the work that had already begun. He expressed thanks to the people of Seattle who had been so friendly over the past few days, and to the host committee and the hundreds of volunteers that had helped with the Conference.

The Session of the Ministerial Conference adjourned at 11.15 p.m.
