

**WTO REGIONAL SEMINAR ON TRADE AND ENVIRONMENT
LIBREVILLE, GABON, 11-13 JULY 2000**

Submission by Burkina Faso

The delegation of Burkina Faso has requested that the following statement be circulated to Members of the Committee on Trade and Environment. This statement was made by the Honourable Zoure O. Léonard, representative of Burkina Faso and spokesman for the participants, at the closure of the WTO regional seminar on trade and environment for French-speaking least-developed countries and other developing countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, held in Libreville, Gabon, from 11 to 13 July 2000.

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1. I am moved and honoured to address you at the conclusion of this seminar. Moved because it is not easy to speak on the behalf of francophone Africa with all its social, cultural, and economic diversity. Honoured because, despite that, I am speaking on behalf of the 22 countries present here.
 2. Trade is the sum of all human activities with the aim of exchanging goods and services between individuals or communities in all kinds of ways. An open, fair and non-discriminatory multilateral trading system has a crucial role to play in national and international efforts to enhance the protection and conservation of national resources and promote sustainable development.
 3. The environment is the entirety of the physical, natural or artificial biological elements and economic, social, political and cultural factors which impact on the process of sustaining life, transformation and development of our surroundings, natural and other resources, and human activities. In short, it is the sum of everything that is socially acceptable, economically expected and above all ecologically tolerable. Trees, water, rivers, mountains, the sky and all that is natural have always been an integral part of our life, our existence, our culture and our civilization in Africa.
 4. So how can you talk about trade to people who live in constant harmony with nature, without including the environmental dimension? The problems which the CTE has to solve are many and complex. It is essential to keep these difficult issues in mind at all times. One cannot over-emphasize the need for all Member countries, especially developing countries, to participate in the deliberations of the CTE. If developing countries are to participate effectively, it is not enough to facilitate their presence in the forums of negotiation or debate. Their presence must be made effective by providing them with technical assistance through exchange of information in seminars such as this one.
 5. The participation of Ambassador Biké, as Chairwoman of the Committee on Trade and Environment, has been most valuable for this seminar and has enriched the debate. To quote her words, we must involve ourselves in the results of the CTE's deliberations by making a positive contribution to the creation of a constructive relationship between trade and environment. Trade and environment are two major areas of policy development and they must be mutually supportive in order to promote sustainable environment.

6. During these three days we have studied the history of the WTO and GATT: the links between trade, environment, and sustainable development; the framework of the discussions in the Committee on Trade and Environment; multilateral environmental agreements and the WTO, specifically the links between the Convention on Biological Diversity and the TRIPS Agreement; and the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and the export of domestically prohibited goods; liberalization of trade and environment, market access and trade opportunities for products which do not harm the environment; the WTO's environmental rules, the environment-related dispute settlement rules in the context of the GATT and the WTO; illustrative case studies, the whole climaxed by a round table on trade, environment and sustainable development.

7. The participants in the seminar would like, through me, to assure you that, acting as intrepid ambassadors of the WTO, they will take to their respective governments a clear explanation of the truth about the WTO, that monster so misguidedly feared by countries with moderate or weak trading capacity for whom, in fact, the WTO offers the opportunity of "trading into the future". However, despite these assurances, we should not lose sight of the wood for the trees, and there is no point in dodging important questions because they always come back.

8. On behalf of the African countries which we represent here, and whose main preoccupations are combatting poverty and improving the living conditions of their people, we would like to share the concerns which have motivated us throughout this seminar. They are in particular:

- Varying degrees of understanding of the implementation and monitoring of the WTO agreements in our countries;
- the almost complete lack of products sold to or dumped on us;
- lack of market access for our products;
- the lack of expertise in regulations, notification, eco-labelling;
- multiple North-South Agreements which are not always easy to implement; and,
- the lack of real commitment, by our countries after signing the agreements, which is very rapidly followed by absenteeism and an empty-chair policy.

9. In the light of the foregoing, it is only natural to think that we, as eminent experts, will call on our governments to take greater responsibility in order to provide our representatives, in the organizations and under the conventions which we have freely signed, with all the political and financial support necessary in these circumstances where Africa's sovereignty is forever at stake because we want a united and strong Africa within the WTO.

10. The participants in the seminar, through me, ask you to convey to his Excellency El Hadj Omar Bongo, President of the Republic of Gabon, and to the Government and people of Gabon, our deep gratitude for their truly African hospitality, with its stamp of brotherhood. I would also like to thank the Government of Denmark for financing this seminar.