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BRUNEI DARUSSALAM

Statement by the Honourable Pehin Dato Abdul Rahman Taib
Minister for Industry and Primary Resources

At the outset, I would like to thank you, the Government and people of Qatar for the hospitality accorded to my delegation and I, and for the arrangements made for this very important meeting.

Allow me also to take the opportunity to welcome the accession to the WTO of the People's Republic of China. We also look forward to the accession of the Separate Customs Territory of Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen and Matsu this afternoon. We believe these are positive steps in making our Organization a truly global one. It should also serve as a reminder of the value that these economies and the 28 others seeking admission, attach to the Organization's relevance and importance in their respective processes of integration into the world economy. Our hope is that the greater predictability from membership in this rules-based Organization will benefit both the acceding economies as well as the existing Members.

I would like to begin by reaffirming Brunei Darussalam's strong support for an open and rules-based multilateral trading system. More importantly, I want to reiterate our commitment to the launch of a new round of multilateral trade negotiations. The pursuit of higher standards of living and full employment, through amongst others, increased trade flows, has taken on greater urgency in the global economic slowdown.

At a difficult time like this, a successful conclusion of this Conference would indeed help boost business confidence and very much enhance the chance for a speedy recovery. I know the stakes are now higher for developed and developing countries alike, but so is the price of failure.

I would therefore join you, Mr Chairman, in your call on all of us to demonstrate the necessary political will and flexibility, to be pragmatic and realistic, so as to ensure that we will not repeat what happened in Seattle.

We wish to commend the good preparatory work that has been undertaken in Geneva under the leadership of both the Chairman of the General Council and the Director-General. In the coming few days, we should focus our attention on resolving the remaining difficult issues.

For a start, we should agree that future negotiations and their outcomes should contribute to economic and social progress in all Members, particularly the developing countries, including smaller ones, which are encountering real difficulties in the implementation of the Uruguay Round Agreements. For many, the promised benefits to economic growth and development have not fully materialized.

The Preamble to the Marrakesh Agreement recognizes that there is need for positive efforts designed to ensure that developing countries secure a share of international trade. We strongly believe that the best way to do this is through the provision of greater focus on and specificity in the provisions for special and differential treatment, as well as enhanced and stronger support for capacity building and technical cooperation. In supporting the proposed Framework Agreement on Special and Differential Treatment, we are of the view that one effective means to enhance confidence in the system, especially among the developing countries, is S&D provisions that are legally binding, operationalizable and enforceable.

On the so-called Singapore issues, Brunei Darussalam continues to believe that the exploratory work on competition policy, transparency in government procurement and trade facilitation should be continued. I am fully aware that the proponents of these issues want negotiations to start as soon as possible. While we are not rejecting the idea outright, like many others, we need more time to study the issues and their far-reaching implications on our domestic situation and development policies. We want to be absolutely convinced that in committing to any negotiations on these areas, developing countries like ours can benefit from the outcomes.

With regard to the environment and sustainable development, we fully agree with the objectives stated in the Preamble to the Marrakesh Agreement. Whilst appreciating the political need of some members to expand the scope and start negotiations on issues such as precautionary principles and eco-labelling, we also recognize that there are many delegations still wary that this may prove to be one slippery road to a protectionist end. We honestly believe that, under the present circumstances, the present language in the Chairman of the General Council's text does offer the best possible compromise.

We would like to stress that internal transparency within the WTO is imperative, if the meaningful participation of all Members, small and large, developing and developed, is to be facilitated. In dealing with the overall conduct of the negotiations in the post-Doha period, we must bear in mind the limited capacity of many smaller delegations. The proper design of the mechanism to handle future negotiations is therefore important to us, because our already over-stretched resources just simply cannot keep pace with and effectively participate in negotiations on too many fronts, all at the same time.

Let me conclude by once again calling upon all WTO Members to take fully into account the interests and concerns of developing countries, especially the least-developed ones, in the future work programme and negotiations. If we want our meeting to succeed and our Organization to come out stronger a few years down the road, let's make this new round truly a "Development Round" that won't just promise, but also deliver real and tangible benefits to its developing Members.

I wish you well in your charge of such a huge responsibility to deliver the outcome that's expected of us by the millions that we represent.
