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NORWAY

Statement by H.E. Mr. Knut Vollebæk Minister for Foreign Affairs

The multilateral trading system has proven a success. On the basis of binding rules, the principles of non-discrimination and MFN-treatment as well as further trade liberalization, the system has contributed significantly to the progress which a large part of the world has witnessed the last fifty years. I am not speaking of economic growth alone, but just as much about social achievements, employment and political stability which prosperity generates. Continuing the momentum of this success, will depend on our ability to enable the international trading system to meet the challenges of the future.

We believe the interests of WTO Members and of the WTO system are best served by a new comprehensive round of negotiations. We face many important issues in addition to the built-in agenda. Market access for non-agricultural products should be a prime area of negotiations. This comprises a broad range of industrial goods, including fish and fish products. Issues such as anti-dumping, trade facilitation and competition policy should also be addressed.

The non-trade concerns of a multifunctional agriculture are of vital importance to Norway. We agreed during the Uruguay Round that further negotiations on agriculture shall be based on Article 20 of the Agreement on Agriculture. Like all WTO Members, Norway is committed by the obligations under this Article. We are concerned that progress in the drafting of the Ministerial Declaration has been stalled by attempts to introduce specific goals which in effect amount to a pre-negotiation of the process we are to embark on next year.

The service sector is of increasing importance for world trade. We are pleased to note that there seems to be broad agreement on how to approach the service negotiations.

Furthermore, the objective of sustainable development must be rendered more operational through the coming round of negotiations. Environmental considerations must be integrated as a horizontal principle in all aspects of the negotiations. I urge Members to conduct environmental reviews of sectors of negotiations.

The system also faces some important systemic challenges which we collectively will have to tackle when charting the course of the organization. These could broadly be characterized by the following three words: cohesion, credibility and legitimacy.

The cohesion of the system needs to be enhanced through firm action aimed at further integration of the developing countries into the world economy. As an important step we must secure the effective participation of all developing country Members in the WTO, with a particular attention to the needs of the LDCs. We agree that we should extend duty-free market access to products originating in the LDCs. We are also prepared to take the necessary steps to improve implementation of the Uruguay accords.

We must improve the provision of trade-related technical assistance. The aim must be the development of human resources and capacity-building in developing countries. I strongly urge Members to support the proposal to secure that the technical assistance provided by the WTO be financed over the regular budgets of the organization. We must make a decision regarding special and differential treatment for developing countries. We are prepared to make existing and new provisions operational. Being one of the founders of the Advisory Centre of WTO Law, I would encourage other Members to join this important initiative.

The credibility of the system requires a more transparent and open system. Furthermore, the concerns expressed in the public opinion in the fields of environment, health, employment, culture and consumer interests must be taken seriously.

The trading system must also develop an increased awareness of core labour standards, while securing that these concerns are not misused for protectionist purposes. There is therefore a need for a dialogue between industrialized countries and developing countries about core labour standards.

Furthermore, it is necessary to expand the horizons of the rules based multilateral trading system. The legitimacy of the system rests in it being relevant to all aspects of international trade. There is a need for the system to develop in parallel with a rapidly changing world.

We welcome the recent progress in China's accession negotiations. The membership of China will be an important enlargement of the WTO. Our neighbour to the east, Russia, is also negotiating for membership, and we trust that these negotiations and negotiations with other applicant countries will be brought to a successful conclusion, making the WTO truly universal.
