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MAURITANIA

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Allow me first of all to offer you my warm congratulations on your election to the Chair of this session and to express my sincere thanks to the Qatari Government and people for their fraternal welcome and generous hospitality.

This Conference is taking place at a crucial time in the history of humankind and must therefore open up a new era in multilateral trade relations. Above all, a clear distinction must be drawn between this Conference and the one held in Seattle two years ago by setting policy directions for the years to come that accommodate the interests of all the WTO Members, and especially the most vulnerable among them.

Indeed, the success of the WTO and the credibility of the multilateral trading system hinge upon addressing the concerns of the developing countries and involving them, on the same footing as the other Members, in the framing and definition of the rules governing the system.

It has to be acknowledged that, more than 50 years after it was put in place, the system has still not achieved its core objectives – that is, prosperity for all peoples and better integration of the economies of developing countries – in spite of the structural reforms and the sacrifices made by developing countries to open up their markets and liberalize their trade.

The multilateral trading system is still affected by asymmetries and imbalances that seriously impede the growth and development of countries of the South, and these are the primary obstacles to be removed if the system is to become more equitable and more predictable.

The imbalance in the multilateral trading system and in some of the Uruguay Round Agreements has resulted in an unfair distribution of the gains and benefits offered by the system.

Many developing countries face tremendous difficulties in implementing the WTO Agreements and have trouble adapting their domestic legislation and enhancing their institutional capacities in order to comply with their obligations.

It is thus imperative to resolve outstanding implementation-related issues and to honour the commitments and obligations embodied in the Uruguay Round Agreements.

This will enable the developing countries to derive greater benefits from the multilateral trading system and to participate fully in its operation.

The priority for our Organization must be to implement the commitments already made, for there is no point in launching new multilateral trade negotiations as long as those commitments have not been honoured.

This is the task that we need to address as a matter of urgency, at the same time ensuring that it is incorporated in a more ambitious agenda centred on development and on the barriers that prevent the developing countries' economic and social progress.

The Fourth Ministerial Conference must therefore be part of the international community's ongoing efforts to eradicate poverty and to ensure equitable and sustainable development for all peoples.

As stated in the Preamble to the Marrakesh Agreement establishing the WTO, trade must be conducted with a view to raising standards of living, ensuring full employment and expanding production, in a manner consistent with the needs of the developing countries, and in particular the least-developed among them.

This essential objective, whose attainment is the joint responsibility of all Members, must lie at the core of all the WTO's activities and decisions.

The developing countries are therefore within their rights and fully in line with the Uruguay Round in calling for an agenda for development that would place this issue at the centre of the Organization's deliberations and decisions.

The agenda should focus on the difficulties facing the developing countries, in particular the least-developed countries, without including new issues that they are not yet ready to deal with.

Because of their disadvantages, which are known to all, these countries will not be able to become involved to the same extent as their partners in a broad-based round of trade negotiations. In order to remain faithful to its mandate and its rules on decision-making, the WTO must adopt the pace of the majority of its Members. It must not engage them in a far-reaching negotiating process for which they do not possess the necessary capacities and which might entail new obligations that they will not be able to fulfil.

The agenda for development proposed by the least-developed countries in Zanzibar is in line with the above reasoning, for its aim is to give priority to the special problems facing the developing countries, with a view to optimizing the benefits they may derive from the multilateral trading system and to ensuring implementation of the multilateral trade agreements and the relevant Ministerial Decisions.

The problem is not therefore one of semantics nor of symbolic attachment to the term "development". It is a substantive issue that will determine the nature of the multilateral trading system in the years to come and the place to be accorded to the numerous countries that still remain on the fringes of the system.

In order to remedy this situation, the future programme will have to focus on integrating these countries and on addressing their concerns in areas such as market access, non-tariff barriers, supply-side constraints, capacity-building, expansion of the production base, transfer of technology, the debt burden, commodity prices and special and differential treatment.

Special attention will have to be paid to the least-developed countries in order to bring to an end and reverse their marginalization and so promote their integration in the global economy.

The international community made a further commitment to that effect at the Third United Nations Conference on Least-Developed Countries in Brussels, and the Ministers of those countries, meeting in Zanzibar last July, adopted a Declaration recalling the constraints facing them and voicing their expectations with regard to the WTO Ministerial Conference.

This Conference will ultimately be judged on its capacity to heed the concerns of those countries, which are the most vulnerable among its Members.

The negotiating objectives and proposals defined by the Ministerial Meeting in Zanzibar are the minimum package required to overcome the special structural difficulties faced by these countries and to foster their integration in global trade.

The implementation of the Integrated Framework for Trade-Related Technical Assistance is still in its very early stages, following the review conducted last year, but it seems to be heading in the right direction. Mauritania was gratified at being selected to take part in the pilot scheme.

Thanks to the studies carried out under the aegis of the World Bank following the selection, we now have a full assessment of our main economic sectors and are waiting to see their results translated into affirmative action under our national poverty reduction strategy.

This strategy was the outcome of lengthy consultation and is designed to be expanded as work progresses in framing the most effective poverty reduction policies.

Consequently, trade integration as a tool for poverty reduction is not only feasible but necessary.

Mauritania was the first country to finalize a poverty reduction strategy framework and has now engaged in a far-reaching political, economic and social reform programme.

These reforms have led to the establishment of a multiparty democracy, the restructuring of the country's macroeconomic framework, refocusing of the role of the State on its core regulatory functions, and improvement of the main sustainable human development indicators.

On the other hand, my country – along with the other least-developed countries – still faces constraints over which it has no control and which hamper its continued efforts to attain international development goals.

The Brussels Programme of Action lays the foundations for a global partnership aimed at overcoming such constraints and difficulties.

It is the duty of the international community gathered in Doha for this WTO Conference to reaffirm the commitments made in Brussels – not in words but through concrete steps that will have a real and practical impact on the day-to-day lives of the populations of least-developed countries and will thus help break down the economic barriers that divide our planet and fuel conflicts between its peoples.

Paradoxically, technology has never evolved so fast, while on the other hand two worlds continue to exist side by side.

A world in which development and growth have reached unprecedented levels and another in which people are haunted by fear and exclusion.

The side that will prevail will be a measure of our will to seize and shape the boundless opportunities offered by globalization.

Globalization will not acquire its true meaning as long as poverty, with its adverse effects on all aspects of life, has not been eradicated and the developing countries have not become fully integrated in the world economy.

This Conference must mobilize the dynamism of the multilateral trading system in order to ensure that globalization becomes a force for the benefit of all humankind and to establish a new partnership to combat marginalization, for liberalization is not an end in itself but aims first and foremost to promote the economic well-being and prosperity of all peoples.

Expediting the accession process for countries seeking to accede to the WTO will strengthen the universality of the multilateral trading system.

In this connection, my country congratulates the States that have become Members of the Organization since the last Ministerial Session and welcomes the forthcoming accession of the People's Republic of China.

The obstacles that still prevent major regional organizations whose mandate encompasses economic issues, such as the Organization of African Unity and the League of Arab States, from obtaining observer status in the WTO bodies will have to be overcome.

The accession of new States proceeds from that same concept of building a genuinely global system, based on the interests of all its Members.

The effectiveness and legitimacy of the multilateral trading system will depend first and foremost on its capacity to integrate all countries and to enable them to reap the benefits and advantages it offers, in a fair and equitable manner.

Such a task lies within our reach for we have the potential to see it through.

It is up to us to decide to do so and thus give everyone sound reasons for believing in the future.
