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TUNISIA

Statement by H.E. Mr. Mondher Zenaïdi Minister for Commerce

I am particularly pleased to take part in the Third Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization in this wonderful city of Seattle and warmly thank the Government of the United States of America for its welcome and for the excellent organization of the Conference, as well as the efforts made to ensure its success.

I should like to convey my warm congratulations to the Chairperson of our Conference on her election. Her abilities as a negotiator and her understanding of the issues are a guarantee of success.

Our Conference is taking place at a particularly important juncture in the development of global economic and trade relations. It has a heavy responsibility, namely, to define the framework for a new round of negotiations aimed at more equitable multilateral trade, meeting the aspirations of all the Member countries but especially the developing countries.

This is why the implementation of the Uruguay Round Agreements is a particularly important subject and should receive close attention. Practical application of the commitments made by all the participants, especially those in favour of developing countries, all developing countries, is the criterion for success. Giving effect to the Decision on the situation of net food-importing developing countries through more appropriate action is of special importance.

The new round should provide an excellent opportunity to remedy the imbalances in the present Agreements so that developing countries can derive concrete and substantial benefits that will accelerate their rate of growth.

We therefore consider that the new round should take place under the sign of development and should in the first place help to define, consolidate and adapt the special and differential treatment in favour of developing country Members to the new context.

The negotiations on agriculture and services should meet the aspirations of all, observing the provisions in the Agreements and decisions already adopted and taking into account each country's level of development.

We therefore consider that the process must respond to the major concerns and expectations, namely, preservation of the balance of rights and obligations as the basic concept underlying the multilateral trading system.

By this, we mean a balance that will allow countries such as mine to accelerate growth by expanding imports and the flow of foreign direct investment and to respond to the increasing numbers seeking jobs.

This will ensure greater, more active and positive participation by developing countries in the globalization process and the fair sharing of its benefits.

It should also be one of the main objectives of the technical assistance activities carried out by the WTO, and they should be strengthened and intensified.

We welcome the efforts made by the WTO Secretariat, UNCTAD and the ITC, as well as the assistance from certain countries, but it should be recalled that technical assistance is one important element in the balance of rights and obligations of Member countries and should be greatly expanded and better adapted to the real needs of the countries concerned.

In this connection, the process of acceding to the World Trade Organization should be encouraged and facilitated by refraining from requiring candidates to assume commitments that are not in harmony with their level of development.

In an address given recently, President Ben Ali said that it was extremely worrying that, at a time when mankind was on the threshold of a new millennium and had made more progress over the past 50 years than in previous millennia, the gap between countries continued to widen with an unending increase in poverty in many regions of the world. This is one of the greatest challenges facing the world's conscience today.

Sustainable development that guarantees growth while at the same time preserves the environment and assures the future of generations to come should also aim to eradicate poverty and eliminate all forms of marginalization, as well as to enhance the capacity of developing countries to combat threats against our environment.

By making the WTO more open to civil society and making its procedures more transparent, all the parties concerned can together lay down the bases of more equitable and more human trade.

The mobilization of international public opinion and the attendance of such large numbers of the media and non-governmental organizations underline the growing role of the World Trade Organization and further underline our responsibility to leave this meeting with decisions that meet the expectations and challenges.

As part of this process, the coherence among trade, financial and monetary policies should be examined very carefully. Tunisia had the honour of being among the first countries to ask the WTO to consider this issue following a recommendation by the African countries meeting in Tunis in 1994. The crisis that affected many developing countries two years ago underlined the need for vigilant and resolute action in this regard.

My country has always stressed the virtues of dialogue and the benefits of mutual consultation. The effective participation of all Members in drawing up the rules of the multilateral trading system and drafting agreements are part of the same process.

We are above all desirous of reinforcing consultation and pursuing our work on the basis of consensus, the World Trade Organization's fundamental rule for action which should continue to govern the work to be undertaken in the forthcoming negotiations and when considering new issues. The cooperation of all developed and developing Members is needed to ensure the success of the negotiations and to strengthen the role of trade as a catalyst for development.
