

WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

WT/MIN(99)/ST/71
1 December 1999

(99-5268)

MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE
Third Session
Seattle, 30 November - 3 December 1999

Original: English

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Statement by the Honourable George Odlum Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Trade

I come from a country where the name WTO is a dirty word. I come from a small, developing, island where the banana farmers, if they had been able, would have been here in Seattle this week, marching and shouting with the protestors on the streets around this convention centre, calling for the dismantling of the WTO. I come from a region where the people are here in spirit with the anti-WTO demonstrators outside.

Their attitude is not born of ignorance of what the WTO stands for. On the contrary, it has been forged from the bitter experience of WTO rulings and Panel reports, which is marginalizing them, by depriving them of access to a banana market on which not only their livelihood, but the future of the economies of so many of our Caribbean countries depend. It is an experience learnt from their betrayal by a country they had considered a friend, who, in the name of a so-called crusade for liberalized trade, sold them out for the profits of a multinational corporation.

The modalities and consequences of the US-led challenge to the European banana marketing regime at the WTO are the strongest indictment yet of the new trading system governed by the WTO. The banana chapter has laid naked the fundamental flaws, inequalities, and injustices of that system.

We found that in the name of liberalization, the system gives scant consideration to the special situation and needs of small, economically disadvantaged developing countries. We discovered that its dispute settlement mechanism relegated us, whose very livelihood and survival was at stake, to a third party status, barely able to raise our voices at its hearings and even having to defend the composition of our delegations. We watched as the system permitted an economically powerful country to be a complainant, even though that country does not grow or export a single banana. We saw it allow that country to have more of a say than us, and to profit from our plight, by imposing sanctions on those who have been assisting us by honouring their international legal commitments under the Lomé Convention.

And so we have come to Seattle to say "NO, NO, NO, NO!"

No, to the central purpose of this gathering as orchestrated by those who have assumed the role of being an economic directorate of the world! No to dictatorship and the imposition of the economic ideology of the strong! No to globalization without ethics! No to liberalization without equity! No to globalization without inclusion! No to liberalization without human security! No to globalization without sustainability! And above all, no to liberalization without development.

How can we, the world's deprived countries, be expected to come here, to this WTO that was supposed to be the epitome of democracy, to put the seal of approval on a declaration that has been developed by "Green Room" procedures to which we have had no access; to discussions in corridors to which only the economic power blocs are privy; to texts from which are expunged every vestige of

the concept of development – with no sensitivity to the plight of the poorest and the smallest among us? No, we cannot!

We must halt, if not stop, this mad rush to human destruction in the name of "liberalization" – it is not the first time in history that virtuous words are used to describe vicious deeds. The injustices inherent in the present system will persist until the advocates of liberalization remove their rose-coloured glasses and view global commerce from the perspective of developing countries like our own. The playing field will never be level. The diverse economic endowment of countries has dictated this; and it is therefore hypocritical to continue on the pretext that all countries will some day be equal in a new benevolent system. The invisible hand of free trade never favours the weak. It always makes the strong, stronger.

When the 20th century began, the richest country in the world was only nine times richer than the poorest. As we begin the 21st century, the richest country in the world, this, our host country, is 63 times richer than the poorest.

The squalid battle which the United States has waged against the smallest of the banana-producing countries in the world has set a tone and a mood of distrust for any new round. We cannot be party to a consensus in that mind set of victimization and insensitivity. We thank the protestors of Seattle and London for showing greater empathy with the wretched of the earth than the Government of the United States. This might well be a springboard for the evolution of the Trade Union of the poor.
