

PRESS RELEASE

PRESS/157
30 November 1999

DIRECTOR-GENERAL'S PRESS STATEMENT

I regret that this morning's opening ceremony could not be held as scheduled. But a successful working lunch of Ministers has just been held. The Plenary Session will begin at 3.00 p.m. as scheduled. The negotiating groups are in full swing. This Conference will be a success.

The United States of America, like all free nations, has a history of peaceful protest. Peaceful protests have led to important reforms and great achievements in the United States. Such protests have been instrumental in leading to a process of dialogue and engagement that had paved the way for achievement. But violence and destructive behaviour have never been part of that process.

Violence is never an appropriate way to settle differences. I know that the violence comes from a tiny segment who through such actions detract from those who have come here to constructively protest. The World Trade Organization has sought in recent years to expand its contacts with people from all segments of society. Our efforts at transparency have not been perfect. More work needs to be done. But progress in this area can only be made through constructive dialogue.

Here in Seattle we have witnessed a very sad day. I urge all people here to show the maximum of restraint in the coming days as we seek to reach an outcome which benefits working families across the world. This is a Ministerial Conference. It is about the right of Ministers to represent their people. I ask people here to respect the rights of the people in other countries, in India, in Fiji and in South Africa to name only a few.

END