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**Ministerial Conference
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MINISTER OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY**

RWANDA

Allow me to begin by first congratulating Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala on her election as the Director-General of this auspicious Organization.

This twelfth WTO Ministerial Conference comes at a critical junction for the World Trade Organization. The global trading environment has been drastically impacted by significant issues that have immeasurably upended global trade and disrupted supply chains.

At the same time, the WTO faces its most important test since the 1994 Marrakesh agreement was signed; how to strengthen and revitalize this multilateral body to shape the future global trading agenda.

The task before us is monumental, and our citizens and the world depend on the outcomes and decisions we will reach during our week together. But I believe we have the critical mass and necessary convergence to achieve a successful ministerial conference.

We align ourselves with the declaration of the Africa Group as presented and reassert the need "to preserve WTO principles and policy tools that promote development and inclusivity and deliver on outcomes that support the integration of Africa in the global economy."

We further align with the statement of the Republic of Kenya on behalf of the East African Community, convinced that developing countries and regions like East Africa offer significant potential to integrate further into the global trading environment with continued support and flexibilities inherent in Agreements of the WTO.

We call on member states to support the LDC Ministerial Declaration, in particular, the need to secure sustainable transition periods for LDCs graduation, reduce non-tariff barriers for LDC market access, especially Sanitary and Phytosanitary measures, and provide financial assistance and capacity building programs on trade-related matters.

Furthermore, the accession of new WTO members to this esteemed body should be expedited, respecting the 2002 LDC Accession Guidelines, in particular the benchmarked levels of commitments and concessions laid out. We reiterate the EAC call for the accession of the Republic of South Sudan and urge member states to support this process.

We underscore the importance of special and differential treatment principles for developing countries and reemphasize the need to strengthen these provisions with a view of making them more precise, effective, and operational. We recall the Group of 90 proposals as a starting point, as these will enable developing countries to achieve industrialization, structural transformation, and diversification of our economies.

We welcome the progress that has been made in the negotiations for the fisheries and agricultural agreement and support the efforts of member states and the WTO Secretariat to conclude these negotiations. We recall the importance of eliminating subsidies that lead to illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, and maintain the relevance of special and differential treatment for LDCs engaged in artisanal and small-scale fishing.

Despite global efforts to ensure vaccine access and equity, developing countries have faced an asymmetrical shortage that has not only continued to cause countless unnecessary hospitalization and deaths, but prolonged the economic misery and recovery efforts of developing countries. We call on member states to consider all possible means to scale up production, including through investments, technology transfer and capacity building to developing countries and regions.

With a view to effectively responding to the COVID 19 pandemic, we welcome the Ministerial declaration on WTO response to the pandemic, and reiterate the importance of transparency, inclusivity, and cooperation in responding to the pandemic. We appreciate the efforts of the WTO Enhanced Integrated Framework and the Aid for Trade initiatives of partners states, in particular the technical and capacity support provided under the trade facilitation agreement implementation.

We take note of the progress made through discussion groups on joint statement initiatives on Investment Facilitation, Domestic Services Regulations, MSMEs, and E-commerce. While discussions on these topics will help to revitalize the negotiating mandate of the WTO and deepen multilateral principles and rules on these topics, we must ensure transparency, inclusivity, and coherence through this process.

These initiatives must make a profound effort to include all member states, with a view of making them truly multilateral. They must not contradict efforts being made under the Africa Continental Free Trade Area Agreement Investment Protocol Negotiations, or ongoing domestic reforms related to investment.

We wholeheartedly welcome the work towards the WTO reforms and believe that this process will be guided by consensus decision making, transparency, and non-discrimination. Importantly, reforms on notification and transparency should not become barriers and burdens on capacity constrained member states.

Finally, in conclusion, allow me to recognize and appreciate the WTO Secretariat for having selected the University of Rwanda to participate in the WTO Chairs Program. As we develop our national capacity, this network will help enhance the understanding and knowledge of civil servants, academia, and the private sector to become more engaged in the multilateral trading system.
