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TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Statement by H.E. Mr Bernard Anthony Weston
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On behalf of the Government and people of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, I wish to extend to the Government and people of Qatar, our heartfelt congratulations on their hosting of this, the Fourth Ministerial Meeting of the World Trade Organisation. I wish also to extend my delegation's appreciation for the warm reception, hospitality and security provided by the Government of Qatar, without which the atmosphere conducive to the conduct of our negotiations would not exist.

Trinidad and Tobago is committed to the principles and objectives of the rules-based multilateral trading system. We believe that a transparent and predictable system of rules is crucial for fostering confidence and promoting enhanced trade and investment flows, particularly at this crucial period, which is characterized by an economic slowdown and a lack of confidence occasioned by the recent increase in terrorist activity.

It is an undeniable fact that developing countries have not been able to maximize the potential gains of trade due to a number of factors. These include a lack of sufficient human, financial and institutional resources, along with obstacles to trade such as the proliferation of tariff, non-tariff and technical barriers, and the non-implementation of the Special and Differential Treatment provisions of the WTO Agreements.

Trinidad and Tobago is a firm supporter of the principles of trade liberalization and trade reform. We recognise, however, the need to ensure that the multilateral trading system and the future work of the WTO must promote the development objectives of its developing Members through the enhancement of their productive capability and competitiveness and improved access to markets.

In this regard, we are of the view that the Singapore issues are not yet ripe for negotiations and should be the subject of further study and analysis in order to determine the possible implications for the economies of developing countries. Moreover, Trinidad and Tobago is also concerned about a possible link of new obligations in these issues to the dispute settlement mechanism.

As we meet today in Doha, amidst talk of the apparent necessity to launch a new Round of negotiations and of such a Round being a "development" Round, the focus of our discussions must be the concerns of the developing countries. Further remedial measures and the Organization's work programme must be designed to enable the developing countries to participate meaningfully and effectively in the multilateral trading system. Trinidad and Tobago holds the view that the existing WTO Agreements should be revisited to ensure that they fulfill their objectives.

It must be a priority of this Organization to ensure that Special and Differential Treatment for developing countries is operationalized and made effective and binding. As a small, island, developing country, Trinidad and Tobago is convinced of the need for the WTO to recognize, as is the case in other international fora, the differences in the levels of development and capacity which exist

among its Members including its developing Members. In this regard, the Organization needs to provide flexibility in the application of rules and obligations and this with particular reference to its smaller, vulnerable and least-developed Members. We warmly welcome the proposal for a WTO Work Programme on Small Economies, designed to facilitate the greater participation and integration of these countries in the multilateral trading system.

As an ACP member country, Trinidad and Tobago shares the concern of its fellow ACP members, on the inordinate and unjustifiable delay in the granting of the waiver request for the ACP/EC Partnership Agreement, the "Cotonou" Agreement. We are firmly of the view that this issue, which has serious systemic implications for the Organization, must be addressed and resolved in the course of this Ministerial Conference.

Trinidad and Tobago like many Members of the WTO, developed and developing countries alike, shares the view that one of the outcomes of this Ministerial Conference must be a clear and unequivocal statement to the effect that "nothing in the TRIPS Agreement shall prevent governments from taking measures for protecting public health and nutrition as well as to ensure access to affordable medicines".

Trinidad and Tobago wishes to make particular mention of the accession procedures in the WTO and to the establishment of a Working Group for the accession of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas, the only CARICOM member country that is not yet a WTO Member. Trinidad and Tobago calls on WTO Members to refrain from placing excessive or onerous demands on the application of this fellow country and also on least-developed countries seeking accession to membership of the Organization.

Trinidad and Tobago welcomes the accession of the People's Republic of China, a founding Member of the GATT, and welcomes China back into the fold.

In closing I wish to reiterate Trinidad and Tobago's support for a strengthened rules-based World Trade Organization and multilateral trading system. We remain convinced that the trade interests of the developing world will only be assured by a strengthened, equitable, balanced and just rules-based system, with "development" as its primary mandate, that takes on board the interests of all its Member countries and in particular the interests of its smallest, most vulnerable and least-developed Members.
