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NAMIBIA

Statement by The Honourable Hidipo Hamutenya
Minister of Trade and Industry

Let me join others who have spoken before me to thank the Emir of Qatar and the Government and the people of Qatar, for hosting the Fourth Ministerial Conference of the WTO. Allow me also, on behalf of my delegation, to extend my gratitude for the excellent facilities and efforts the Qatari authorities have made to ensure the success of this gathering.

We are meeting at a critical moment when the multilateral trading system and the WTO are at a crossroads. The outcome of Doha will have far reaching implications for the millions of people we are representing here today. Equally, Doha will determine and shape the future direction of the multilateral trading system. Six years after the implementation of the Uruguay Round Agreements, the central question is whether the next few years will see the WTO members focusing efforts to rectify the existing imbalances in the rules and systems, or adding new issues which will overload the agenda of the multilateral trading system.

Developing countries continue to experience great difficulties in implementing the Uruguay Round Agreements due to limited human and technical capacities. Imposition of new obligations on developing countries will be counterproductive for the functioning of both the multilateral trading system and the developing countries concerned.

The Namibian economy is highly trade-dependent. Export growth is the main driving force of our economic development agenda. The country's major trade policy objective is the integration of the national economy into the global economy. Our policies take due consideration of the multilateral trading system in order to avoid economic marginalization. As a small country, Namibia is strongly interested in maintaining a well-functioning multilateral trading system, which is committed to ensuring balance between rights and obligations.

Namibia, despite its level of development, maintains a liberal trade regime and supports further trade liberalization. However, the liberalization of trade is not an end in itself but the means to an end, which is, economic growth and development.

Agriculture means much more than being just one of the economic sectors. It provides a livelihood for about 70 per cent of the Namibian population and underpins the social and economic fabric of our society. As such, any multilateral arrangement on agriculture should be flexible to take into account development needs of the developing economies. In our view, development oriented policies should be able to address the non-trade concerns of developing countries.

We are encouraged and fully support the adoption of a Declaration specifically on TRIPs and Public Health. What WTO needs is to affirm the flexibility in the TRIPs Agreement to ensure accessibility to affordable medicines in order to treat communicable and opportunistic diseases like

HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. Reaching agreement on those outstanding matters would send a positive signal to the world, which is in line with our call for a developmental agenda in the WTO.

My country recognizes the importance of the protection of the environment. However, the use and the linkage between trade and environment for protectionist purposes, is not acceptable. Nonetheless, the work of the Committee on Trade and Environment should continue.

Namibia reaffirms its strong support for the decision taken at the WTO's Ministerial Conference in Singapore in 1996 that the competent body to set and deal with labour issues is the ILO. Namibia believes that trade sanctions are neither an appropriate nor an effective means to improve labour standards.

Like many other developing countries that have spoken before me, Namibia is not ready at this point in time to engage in negotiations on Singapore issues. The various working groups that have been established should continue to study the respective subjects to enable us to fully understand the implications of multilateral disciplines in the Singapore issues. Any decision for negotiations at this stage will be premature.

Trade preferences remain vital to our economies. However it is disappointing to note that the request to grant a WTO waiver on the ACP/EU Cotonou Agreement has not been realised. I would therefore like to call on our meeting here in Doha, to take a decision on this very important matter.

Finally, we want to join others in congratulating China and Chinese Taipei for their accession to the WTO. This is a major step in that the WTO has truly become a global organization.
