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Statement by H.E. Mr. Khalifa Ababacar Sall Minister of Commerce and Handicrafts

May I first of all, on behalf of His Excellency Mr Abdou Diouf, President of the Republic of Senegal, the Senegalese Government, and the Delegation accompanying me and on my own behalf, express our deep gratitude and appreciation for the warm welcome and attention that we have received since our arrival in the beautiful city of Seattle.

It is a real source of satisfaction to us Senegalese that this Conference of the World Trade Organization is taking place in the United States of America, a country that is a great friend of Senegal, connected to Africa by historic links which have generated exemplary relations of cooperation, based on mutual interest and active solidarity.

The United States has proved to the rest of the world the virtues of "commercial diplomacy", the features of which are trade in goods and services and, above all, an attachment to the principles of the multilateral trading system.

Allow me also to take this opportunity to offer our warm congratulations to Mr. Mike Moore, who has been at the head of our Organization for some months. These congratulations also go to the newly appointed Deputy Directors-General.

The celebration of the 50th anniversary of the multilateral trading system and the holding of the Second Ministerial Conference of the WTO in Geneva in May 1998 were the occasion for us to:

- Reaffirm the increasingly important role of trade in the development of countries and the *rapprochement* of peoples;
- Underline the need to lift trade barriers;
- Deplore the marginalization of most of the developing countries;
- Express the need for balance, fairness and justice in taking into account the interests of all the WTO Members.

I for my part would like today to stress certain recent facts which confirm that the implementation of the WTO Agreements must remain our prime concern.

In spite of the immense efforts made in almost all countries to improve the national environment, Africa's share in world trade has fallen to less than three per cent.

Similarly, the developing countries' share in world trade in 1998 fell for the first time in over a decade.

In addition, from 1995 to the present, the developing countries in general and the African countries in particular have shouldered the heavy burden entailed in implementation of the WTO Agreements. The consequence of this, which can never be over-emphasized, has been an increase in their imports while their exports encounter certain obstacles such as tariff peaks, tariff escalation and technical standards.

Finally, the implementation of certain WTO Agreements still poses numerous problems for our countries. These should therefore be examined in depth in order to eliminate distortions and imbalances.

Hence we feel that our current priorities should be taken into account, and these include the following main issues:

- Immediately addressing implementation concerns, before launching a new round of trade negotiations;
- Extending transitional periods for developing countries in the context of the Agreements on Customs Valuation and on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights;
- Improving the quality of technical cooperation and including it in the regular WTO budget;
- Increasing the possibilities of access for our goods and services to the markets of our main partners and strengthening our national capacities with a view to making better use of the opportunities provided by the multilateral trading system;
- Developing sub-regional and regional groupings, since integration constitutes an essential link capable of boosting the corporate spirit and individual capacities.

In this regard, I am pleased to emphasize that some of our countries have embarked on a massive project of regional and sub-regional construction.

The aim of these initiatives is to enable economic activity to take place not only in a wider framework but also in a modern legal context similar to the one that OHADA, the organization for the harmonization of African business law is trying to establish in West Africa.

Naturally, the creation of these spaces makes a strong contribution to consolidation of the multilateral trading system.

It would therefore be desirable for the WTO to extend to these groupings the attention it gives to the States of which they are composed.

From our point of view, shared by the other Members of the West African Economic and Monetary Union, such an approach is capable of enhancing the expected impact of technical cooperation.

In addition, our Conference must pay special attention to the 48 least-developed countries, 33 of which are in Africa.

The international community's treatment of them should therefore be in keeping with their situation, in an endeavour more particularly to pave the way for them to real and positive change.

As to the question of debt, it represents on average four-and-a-half times the value of the export earnings of some of our countries.

If we want trade liberalization and the strengthening of the multilateral framework to contribute towards better integration of the developing countries into the global economy and international trade, trade and development must be freed from the burden of debt.

Again, to take greater account of all the above, the new round of multilateral trade negotiations, which we regard as the development round, should therefore:

- Give real meaning and substance to the principle of special and differential treatment;
- Give our countries even greater importance and display stronger solidarity;
- Open up developed country markets, in particular by removing tariff and non-tariff barriers and inappropriate trade conditionalities;
- Readjust current interests within the WTO because if, as Mr. Renato Ruggiero, the former Director-General, said, the challenge of the last 50 years was to manage a divided world, the challenge now is to manage an interdependent world, and our institutional and mental landscapes must change.

In short, we must take full account of the concerns of public opinion in our countries, which, having already been affected by the impact of the Uruguay Round Agreements, is following developments in the multilateral trade negotiations with a great deal of apprehension.

This is the way for us to improve the image of the WTO *vis-à-vis* the people of our countries and engage in fruitful dialogue between the Organization and civil society.

Lastly, I should like to reaffirm our faith in the multilateral trading system as a factor for growth and stability.
