

WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

WT/MIN(03)/ST/107
13 September 2003

(03-4892)

MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE
Fifth Session
Cancún, 10 - 14 September 2003

Original: English

OMAN

Statement Circulated by the Minister of Commerce and Industry

It is an honour and a privilege for me to represent the Sultanate of Oman at the Fifth WTO Ministerial Conference. My delegation and I are grateful to the Government and the people of Mexico for making excellent arrangements for this Conference and for their warm welcome and hospitality extended to me and my delegation.

We are also grateful to Director-General Supachai and the staff of the WTO Secretariat for the documentation and logistical arrangements for this Conference.

The Sultanate of Oman is a free market economy and has followed an open and liberal trade policy for a long time. It strongly believes in the principles of the multilateral trading system. Oman thus had no problem in joining the WTO, without recourse to any transition periods.

During its accession process, Oman made very extensive commitments on tariffs, on agriculture and on services. We bound our tariffs at very low levels, joined a number of sectoral initiatives, made a commitment not to use export subsidies on agricultural products, and made liberal commitments on a large number of sectors and sub-sectors of services.

The Sultanate of Oman and other newly acceded countries should neither be asked nor expected to make any further concessions and commitments on tariffs, on agriculture and on services. We are rather disappointed with the provisions relating to newly acceded countries in the Framework for Modalities in Agriculture and in Non-Agricultural Products. We sincerely hope that these are adequately strengthened when the Modalities are adopted by the respective negotiating bodies.

Important developments are taking place in the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) countries. Five of the six GCC member States, including Oman, are already Members of the WTO. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, at present having an "Observer" status, has recently signed a bilateral market access agreement with the European Union and hopefully bilateral agreements with others would follow, making it possible for Saudi Arabia to become a full Member. We strongly support Saudi Arabia's early accession to the WTO.

The six GCC countries have already formed a Customs Union, which has become operational from 1 January 2003, ahead of the original schedule, providing for a unified customs tariff on goods imported into any of the GCC countries and their subsequent free movement within the region. With the membership of Saudi Arabia in the WTO, the GCC countries will play a coordinated and effective role in strengthening the multilateral trading system.

Oman is also a member of the Greater Arab Free Trade Agreement which is being implemented and all trade within the region should be free by the end of the year 2005, ahead of the original schedule.

A number of other Arab countries, including Algeria, Sudan, Yemen and Lebanon, are also in the process of accession. Oman supports their early accession to the WTO. The Sultanate of Oman calls upon WTO Members to accelerate the accession process.

Let me conclude by hoping that the decisions we take at this Conference would reinforce the WTO, spread its benefits equitably and result in placing the needs and interests of developing countries at the heart of the multilateral trading system, so that the negotiations live up to the spirit of the Doha Development Agenda.
