

# WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

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**MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE**  
**Second Session**  
**Geneva, 18-19 May 1998**

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## SAARC

### Statement Circulated by the Commerce Ministers

On the eve of the Second Ministerial Conference of the WTO, we, the Members of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation,

*Affirm* our commitment to the multilateral trading system which, by providing a rule-based framework for international trade relations, has an invaluable role in promoting global economic growth;

*Note* that the benefits of liberalization have been disappointingly asymmetrical with liberalization proceeding at a much slower pace in areas of special interest to developing countries, increased trade and investment bypassing the majority of developing countries, and increasing income disparities among and within countries;

*Express concern* at the prescription of liberalization as a panacea for all economic problems, thereby detracting attention from the urgent need to resolve structural impediments to development - the crippling debt burden of the developing countries, the need for concessional development finance and restrictions on the transfer of technology;

*Agree* that trade liberalization should be a means to promote the economic well being and prosperity of all countries;

*Stress* that the multilateral trading system must ensure mutual and balanced benefits for all WTO Members;

*Agree* that the Second WTO Ministerial Conference should clearly:

- reiterate the primacy of the multilateral trading system, which includes a framework for the development of regional trade agreements which are complementary to it and consistent with its rules,
- reject the new forces of protectionism that are disguised as concerns about the environment, social conditions, labour standards, and all other forms of non-tariff barriers,
- accelerate the process of liberalization in areas of special interest to developing countries,
- encourage developed country Members maintaining quantitative restrictions on textile and clothing products to speedily eliminate such restrictions in order to provide

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commercially meaningful market access for developing country exports of these products, and harmonization of rules of origin on a non-discriminatory basis,

- ensure the effective implementation of the provisions on special and differential treatment for developing countries,
- stress the need for speedy and full implementation of the decisions and recommendations of the WTO High Level Meeting on Integrated Initiatives for the Trade Development of the LDCs which includes greater market access for their products, capacity building in their trade related activities and enhanced investment flows to them.

*Agree* that the main task before the WTO Ministerial Conference is to initiate an effective process to identify the problems encountered in the course of the implementation of inherent in the Uruguay Round Agreements, and suggest ways and means to redress these problems;

*Concur* that the future activities of the WTO must focus firstly, on securing a full and balanced implementation of the already concluded Agreements and, secondly, on fulfilling the decisions taken in regard to the negotiations and future work provided for in the "Built-in Agenda";

*Urge* that all decisions adopted at the Ministerial Conference must be achieved through a transparent process, be based on consensus and aim at achieving overall balance of interests of all Members, especially developing country Members.

Signed by the following countries:

Bangladesh  
Bhutan  
India  
Maldives  
Nepal  
Pakistan  
Sri Lanka

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