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BRUNEI DARUSSALAM

Statement Circulated by H.E. Mr. Pehin Dato Abdul Rahman Taib,
Minister of Industry and Primary Resources

On behalf of the delegation of Brunei Darussalam, I would like to congratulate you on your election as Chairman and thank you, the Government and the people of Switzerland for the warm hospitality accorded to us during our stay in Geneva. May I also commend the Director-General and his staff for their valuable contributions and welcome the efforts toward the strengthening of the WTO Secretariat.

It has been four years since we met in Marrakesh to conclude the most demanding ever multilateral trade negotiations. And with the First Ministerial Conference which was convened in Singapore, we have a tremendous work programme that lies ahead of us.

This then begs the question: What are our priorities?

We believe that the implementation of the Uruguay Round commitments should remain our top priority. If the gains are to be realized, we must ensure that these Agreements are fully and faithfully implemented.

In so doing, we recognize the numerous problems that have to be overcome. The myriad notification and legislation requirements, amongst others, impose a heavy burden on the limited resources of smaller developing countries. They also face costly and often, peculiar structural adjustment difficulties. It would indeed be most helpful if measures such as, but not limited to, technical assistance, are given due emphasis.

Now, let me turn to future activities. I have been listening to what colleagues have been saying in the past few days and I agree that globalization is no longer a mere abstract concept, but a growing reality, which has made the structure of the world economy a more complex one. It is also generally accepted that the best way forward for countries in such a situation is to continue with the process of progressive trade liberalization.

The discipline imposed by the market is no doubt invaluable. But to ensure that all Member countries benefit from this, it is imperative that the developing Member countries are given sufficient time to develop their own capacity to cope.

For this reason, we should be realistic in our expectations. The WTO's resources must not be squandered on controversial and potentially divisive issues. We therefore believe that at this juncture, it would be premature to advance the work on trade and investment, trade and competition policy,

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and transparency in government procurement beyond the educative process as mandated by our First Conference.

Specifically on trade and environment, we hope that concerns for the environment continue to be addressed in a manner which does not undermine market access. In this regard, the Committee on Trade and Environment should continue to assess the relationship between trade provisions in Multilateral Environmental Agreements and the multilateral trading system.

On the issue of electronic commerce, we accept that technological progress has dramatically changed the manner we conduct our business. However, before proceeding further, there is a need for us to fully understand all its implications. We are prepared, nevertheless, to go along with the proposed work programme.

In all this, we would like to reiterate our call that the interests of developing countries not be subordinated. Trade is after all, a means to an end. No country should be left on the margins. The greatest challenge before us therefore, is to reconcile the diverse needs and aspirations of all Members.

We would also like to reiterate our firm support for the universality of WTO membership. We urge that the process of accession of the applicants, including some ASEAN members, be expeditiously carried out.

Finally we would like to warmly welcome the offer by the United States to host our next conference. The fact that the United States is making this gesture at this crucial juncture augurs well for the future of the multilateral trading system.
