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URUGUAY

Statement by H.E. Dr. Didier Opertti,
Minister of Foreign Affairs

Uruguay has come to Seattle with the firm intention of adding its voice, efforts and hopes to those of the other WTO Member countries who want a successful ministerial meeting and the launch of a new round of multilateral trade negotiations in the WTO framework that reflects the interests of all.

In the scant five minutes we have for making our address, I shall confine myself to spelling out my country's position on one aspect which we consider absolutely essential for attaining this objective.

This new round, the eighth since the creation of the GATT, must achieve the objective of fully integrating agricultural trade into the same rules, standards and disciplines as other goods within the WTO. In other words, and I wish this to be clearly understood, the forthcoming multilateral trade negotiations have to be the last stage of this integration, so ending the unfair discrimination from which the agricultural sector has suffered for more than fifty years by always being considered a special case.

Our position is just and reasonable. There is no reason why efficient agricultural producers, of which my country is certainly one, whose growth and development are directly linked with this sector, have to continue facing barriers, distortions and discrimination of all kinds in order to have access to the markets of developed countries, while the tariffs and non-tariff measures for industrial products, capital goods or high technology products are cut to a minimum or eliminated. Nor is there any reason why, despite its efficiency and comparative advantages at the world level, our country's share of world agricultural exports should continue to decline as a result of the trade distortions, domestic support policies and export subsidies of agriculturally inefficient developed countries which do not wish to apply to agriculture the liberalization recipes they advocate for the rest of the world of trade.

I am far from indulging in rhetoric here: this is indeed a make-or-break issue for Uruguay.

The Marrakesh Agreements established a mandate for continuing the agricultural negotiations. However, I wish to say once again that Uruguay has for some time come out in favour of a new round as the most suitable and practical means of obtaining results that take account of the interests of all parties. It is in this spirit that we are joining in these discussions, but on the understanding that agriculture will have high priority in negotiations arising out of the Seattle meeting. In recent weeks we have made great efforts and displayed great flexibility in order to reach an agreement along these lines. Nevertheless, this has not been possible. We have the feeling that there was a wish to leave all decisions to this Seattle meeting.

To conclude, we think it is important to stress two essential points that we must bear in mind at all times as the backdrop to our work at this Ministerial Conference. The first is the need to find the overall balance of these negotiations within the framework of the broad range of different issues that we will finally agree upon as the basis for negotiations. This balance includes agriculture, but is not confined to agriculture. The second is to accept that for the time being the only subjects that we have agreed to negotiate after Seattle are those included in the built-in agenda (agriculture, services and some intellectual property aspects). We want to be able to establish negotiating mandates with clear and precise objectives and modalities for these subjects. If the political will to do this is lacking, there will be no reason to launch a broad new round of multilateral negotiations at Seattle. If that should happen, we will resume the mandated negotiations in Geneva. Naturally, in that case we are not prepared to pay any additional cost for this.

We wish to make it clear that Uruguay is categorically opposed to the inclusion of the concept of multi-functionality in the agricultural negotiations. First, because multi-functionality is a concept applicable to all production sectors - industrial, services and investment. If it is to be analysed in the WTO, this should be done across-the-board, taking account of all subjects and not agriculture alone. Second, because it is merely another argument, perhaps more sophisticated but along the same lines as the other older traditional ones, to justify protectionism. And third, because the objectives of food security, environmental conservation, bio-diversity, rural development and job creation can be attained far better through measures specifically targeted at these ends rather than by other means that distort agricultural production and international trade.

Uruguay accepts that the negotiations should take account of certain non-trade concerns, as mentioned in Article 20 of the Agreement on Agriculture. But these concerns should be dealt with through specific, transparent and non-distorting measures: in other words, through the green box. In the case of developing countries, we could possibly consider some of them in the context of special and differential treatment.

In keeping with its tradition and attitude so far, Uruguay will continue to deploy its best efforts for a successful meeting in Seattle. It will do so in a constructive spirit and in the belief that this is in the interests of all. Uruguay certainly wants to be on board the train that was mentioned yesterday. But not as a passive passenger, nor as sole driver, but rather with full awareness of the destination towards which we are heading and the route we will take to get there, and pooling the forces that will both fuel and justify our journey.
