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THE GAMBIA

Statement by the Honourable Musa H. Sillah Secretary of State for Trade, Industry and Employment

May I first of all congratulate you on your assumption of the Chairmanship of this august gathering. I am confident that under your leadership, we will have fruitful deliberations on the many formidable challenges that are facing us. I would therefore like to assure you of the Gambian delegation's full support and cooperation.

May I also seize this opportunity to express my delegation's sincere appreciation and gratitude to the American authorities, particularly the Organizing Committee, for the warm welcome and the excellent facilities they have placed at our disposal. In the same vein, I would like to pay special tribute to Director-General Mike Moore and his staff for facilitating the participation of my delegation to this Conference.

My delegation would like to address the issue of implementation. The importance of this issue cannot be over-emphasized, because it constitutes one of the fundamental elements that can translate into concrete reality the promises that the new trade regime holds for developing countries.

Of particular importance is the issue of unfettered duty-free market access for the products of the least-developed countries. I say unfettered access because experience has shown that promises of market access are often combined with unilateral sanitary and phytosanitary standards which frustrate any attempt to exploit the market access offers made by developed countries.

Indeed while Article 2.3 of the Agreement on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures prohibits unilateral actions that distort market access possibilities, so far experience has shown that SPS measures have constituted major trade barriers to agricultural and horticultural exports from developing countries, especially from the least-developed countries. Thus both the Agreements on Technical Barriers to Trade and Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures have not been effectively implemented – much to the detriment of least-developed economies.

My country therefore fully endorses and subscribes to the call for the discussion here in Seattle and beyond to focus on modalities that seek to strengthen standard-setting disciplines and procedures.

Another issue of vital importance to my delegation is the implementation of the Integrated Framework for Trade-Related Assistance to Least-Developed Countries. We should be bold to state that so far, the framework has been totally disappointing.

Just last week, we convened in Geneva the Gambia's roundtable conference on trade, investment and private sector development within the context of the Integrated Framework. The gathering suffered not only from poor donor turnout, it also failed to prompt firm pledges from the limited number of those who attended.

The disappointing and bitter experience of the roundtable has been shared with other LDCs through a statement we have circulated to delegates here in Seattle. The Government of The Gambia strongly calls for the improvement of the Integrated Framework mechanism in general and in particular for better mechanisms to mobilize resources to finance not only the costly preparatory process which the Integrated Framework entails, but also the projects and programmes agreed upon. The Government of The Gambia will continue to sensitize all the development partners on the need for firm and bound pledges within the context of the Integrated Framework.

Furthermore, the Government of The Gambia calls for an urgent independent review of the Integrated Framework. The aim of that exercise is to reach a common understanding of the objectives of the Integrated Framework, the institutional arrangement for its implementation and the expected outcome of the initiative. The review exercise will also identify modalities for the mobilization of resources to facilitate the implementation of the various projects and programmes proposed by the least-developed countries. This alone can move the programme forward.

Finally, may I add my voice to the call by many developing countries, particularly the least-developed ones, for greater assistance to address the supply-side constraints that have hitherto inhibited the growth of our exports. Indeed, supply-side constraints account for the criticism levied against the Lomé Conventions. The preferential market access that the EU has given over the years to the ACP countries under the Lomé Conventions has failed to improve the exports of ACP countries in general. This shows clearly that duty-free market access for exports is of no use when the capacity to export is quasi-non-existent.

Our development partners must therefore match market openings for our exports with innovative, concrete and result-oriented measures that aim at enhancing our competitiveness through, *inter alia*, infrastructure and human resources development, exports diversification as well as human and institutional capacity building.
