

**MULTILATERAL TRADE
NEGOTIATIONS
THE URUGUAY ROUND**

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GABON

Statement by His Excellency Mr. Patrice Nziengui
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After 97 months of intensive negotiations following the Ministerial Declaration of Punta del Este which heralded the seventh round of multilateral negotiations in the history of world trade, the Uruguay Round will come to an end in a few hours' time with the signature of the Final Act here at Marrakesh, in the Kingdom of Morocco that has welcomed us with all the warmth of which we know this African country and its sovereign, His Majesty King Hassan II, to be capable.

On behalf of Gabon, I wish to extend my deepest thanks to the King of Morocco for having offered his country as host to this world meeting on African soil.

I would like to begin by asking you to cast your minds back and remember the state of the world in 1947, when the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade was first mooted. This was the result of factors which were extremely adverse to liberalization in the 1930s: steep increases in customs duties on industrial products, the imposition of quantitative restrictions in all areas and particularly on agricultural products, and the application of import quota policies. These measures led ineluctably to a deflationary depression which, more than any other factor, fuelled the world slump that began in 1929.

The lesson learned during those dark years for the international economy was that the way to combat a slump lies not so much in self-sufficiency and the adoption of unbridled protectionist measures which only exacerbate it, as in taking the offensive through trade-promotion policies, which are the only means of bringing back collective and individual prosperity through increased international demand and a return to the benefits to be derived from spreading the cumulative and enriching effects of foreign trade.

The founding fathers of GATT drew their conclusions in 1947 and we too must bear them constantly in mind as a guide and inspiration for our various economic and monetary policies.

The work that has been done since the opening of the Uruguay Round is tremendous. It constitutes a prodigious step forward in world economic relations.

None of the 15 subjects dealt with in this seventh round of multilateral trade negotiations can leave our States indifferent.

In recent years, the international community has focused its attention above all on questions concerning agriculture, services, trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights, and textiles and clothing. For this we thank and commend the various negotiators and the contracting parties most

closely involved for the acceptable outcome. However, we must not forget the other topics, with less media appeal, such as the creation of the World Trade Organization to manage world trade as from next year, the settlement of disputes, the articles of the General Agreement, the functioning of the GATT, customs unions and free-trade zones, customs valuation, anti-dumping measures, subsidies and countervailing measures etc., which must necessarily lead to an open and effective trade system. Gabon is very grateful for the role played by the GATT Secretariat, in particular for the initiative and personal commitment displayed by the former Director-General, Mr. Arthur Dunkel, who from the outset of the Uruguay Round put all his experience in the area of international trade and all his diplomatic savoir-faire into bringing about the successful conclusion of this vast enterprise, and by the present Director-General, Mr. Peter Sutherland, a pragmatic and experienced man who, following up on the accomplishments of his predecessor, achieved results that the international community had hardly expected, so great had become the antagonisms and the tensions among the great trading nations in relation to the particularly thorny and emotional issues that have weighed upon the negotiating atmosphere since the setback suffered at the Brussels Ministerial Meeting in 1990.

The African countries, and Gabon in particular, are interested in the progress and outcome of the discussions on tropical products, where we consider that we have a special interest to defend.

Indeed, during the Mid-Term Review held in Montreal in 1988, an agreement was more or less achieved in this field and should have come into force long ago, particularly in view of the specific characteristics of the countries concerned, which include many of the least-developed countries. This did not happen. I deplore this failure, as do my African colleagues and our various populations, which felt side-lined during the negotiations that followed the Mid-Term Review. Admittedly, and we are very ready to recognize this, since we have suffered from it enormously and often much more than our due, the difficult recovery from the interminable crisis in the principal industrialized countries has done nothing to encourage the expression of active solidarity with their least-developed partners, who expected much from the implementation of these agreements.

Must the disappointment felt by our various countries, as a result of what was seen as a lack of generosity, now give way to a euphoria, which it is hard to share even though we try to find every possible consolation in the benefits that we are promised will certainly be derived from the global agreement?

In view of the loss of significant benefits under the various EEC/ACP agreements, we are bound to think that realism and a clear concern for their own national interests under highly profitable regional agreements have led several of our partners to show very little concern for the interests of countries such as my own, which have had great difficulty up to now in overcoming their domestic economic, social and political problems.

My country, Gabon, like many others in Africa, has been engaged since 1990 on a policy of democratization of its political system, while at the same time endeavouring to achieve ever greater trade liberalization, so that it can benefit from the advantages of free trade.

However, it is clear that the measures taken with these different aims in view are bound to influence each other and lead to apparently contradictory results. These are sometimes criticized and might give the impression of a desire on our part not to conform to universal standards of human rights and their observance.

Before the international community assembled here we reaffirm Gabon's desire to be a democratic country and to be recognized as such. Our fundamental task is therefore to concentrate on improving the organization of the economy and achieving better economic performance with a view to ensuring the collective and individual social well-being of all the people of Gabon.

This reminds me of the spirit of the Ministerial Declaration of Punta del Este, which affirmed that the aim of the negotiations was to achieve the expansion of international trade and especially of the less-developed contracting parties.

The signature of the Final Act of the "Uruguay Round" should enable us to achieve the objective which is common to all the peoples of the world: a happier and more satisfying life.

Enough of yesterday's passions; enough of political, strategic or nationalist tensions. Let us endeavour to achieve a satisfactory level of progress. The contracting parties need to remember that the conclusion of the Uruguay Round will not result in integral economic development at an agreed and constant pace for all. Economic and monetary crises, the effects of the sometimes anarchic fluctuations in the exchange rates of the principal currencies, the steady deterioration of the terms of trade, and the difficulties of breathing new life into a coherent policy for commodity production and marketing, despite the establishment of the Common Fund for Commodities, will continue to contribute to an uncertain future for developing countries and LDCs, in which they will be exposed to an increasing number of perils.

Following their success in bringing the Uruguay Round to fruition, the contracting parties must now embark with the same determination on resolving the problem of underdevelopment. In this respect, Gabon considers that the stimulus will come from the international community being able to resolve the thorny problem of basic commodities and the no less dramatic question of over-indebtedness, and their impact on developing countries.

I would not wish to conclude this statement without once again thanking the Moroccan authorities and the King of Morocco for the warmth of their hospitality and the quality of the organization aimed at ensuring the success of this Ministerial Meeting of the GATT. I also wish to congratulate you, Mr. Chairman, and through you, your great and beautiful country of Uruguay, whose name will always be linked to the history of world trade, as a token and a pledge of its openness to the modern world.