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SIERRA LEONE

Statement by H.E. Dr Kadi Sesay
Minister of Trade and Industry

I thank you and your Government for hosting this Ministerial Conference and for the excellent arrangements and hospitality.

Sierra Leone hopes for a successful outcome of these deliberations, an outcome that should engender a spirit of mutual cooperation, mutual interest and mutual benefits for both developed and developing countries.

Sierra Leone and other developing countries participate in the multilateral trading system with the expectation that globalization would lead to our economic development and trade benefits will reach many people in our countries and so alleviate poverty. We are interested in a system that will make our people richer and not poorer.

But since the Uruguay Round Agreement, the much hoped for turning-point for many of the economies of developing countries has not been realized. The predicted gains have proved to have been far shorter than expected. Foreign direct investment into LDCs has been negligible. Similarly, gains in terms of faster growth, greater employment opportunities and reduced levels of poverty have been less than satisfactory.

Nearly two years ago in Doha, we launched the Doha Development Round of trade negotiations and the Doha work programme in which we saw elements that could usher in a new beginning to address issues of particular interest to developing countries.

Regrettably, the development dimension envisaged under the Doha work programme has not lived up to expectations. Looking back at progress made so far, my delegation joins others in expressing their dissatisfaction that, notwithstanding the fact that we have taken up the challenge and inevitably moved ahead to reform our economies in line with the tenets and principles of globalization, we still experience instances of lack of progress in addressing the problems of market access, domestic supply constraints, finance and the required technical assistance that will ensure that developing countries see the benefits of globalization.

Progress on the issues of market access for our agricultural products, through the removal of export and domestic subsidies by the developed countries and the enhancement of supply capacity in the agricultural and industrial sectors, are important to the people of Sierra Leone.

As a country, Sierra Leone has gone through very difficult moments in ending eleven years of rebel war with untold human and physical destruction. The war also had a debilitating effect on social and economic activities. But peace has now been restored and peaceful democratic elections held.

Sierra Leone is now making significant strides in consolidating the peace, pursuing policies geared towards the rehabilitation and reconstruction of its infrastructure, the reintegration of ex-combatants, resettlement of refugees and the internally displaced. We have successfully undertaken prescriptive economic recovery measures resulting in a 7 per cent economic growth, 2 per cent rate of inflation and a stable currency.

Whilst Sierra Leone has made tremendous political and macroeconomic progress in less than two years following the end of the war, the country however faces peculiarly serious trade-related post-conflict constraints of reconstructing the devastated infrastructure and building human and other supply capacity that will enable us to take advantage of increasing market access opportunities that will lead the country's integration into the multilateral trading system. And for this, I wish to especially record our appreciation for the positive capacity-building initiatives that are now being considered for Sierra Leone by various organizations including the WTO, UNIDO, the Commonwealth Secretariat, the European Union and the ITC.

The commitment by the developed countries to eliminate distortions in world agriculture caused by their policies of export and domestic subsidies is the needed solution to resolving the differences between the developing countries and our developed allies. The high level of protection in the developed countries' agriculture has seriously eroded the ability of our farmers to compete fairly.

Market access opportunities for developing countries' agricultural commodities are therefore being implicitly denied. This makes special and differential treatment for agriculture in the developing countries imperative. For Sierra Leone, special and differential treatment is needed to enable us to catch up with other countries as we have just emerged from an eleven-year war. The dismantling of barriers to agricultural trade is therefore the key issue for the resolution of the problem which has inhibited the capacity of African countries to compete and has led to an erosion of our ability to add value to raw materials.

Agriculture has very deep consequences for the development of Sierra Leone. Almost 70 per cent of the population is engaged in the sector. Earnings from our agricultural and tropical produce are of priority to domestic savings and subsequent industrial growth. Thus there is a need to remove the imbalances in the present system. My delegation therefore welcomes the current positive pronouncements and moves on the removal of export and domestic subsidies by some of our key development partners.

We are disappointed at the seeming lack of progress made in areas such as transfer of technology and trade, debt and finance. These are issues of extreme significance to developing countries.

Sierra Leone, like many other least-developed countries, continues to experience serious external debt problems. We are faced with the problem of mobilizing development finance to support our post-conflict development and poverty alleviation that will enable us meet the Millennium Development Goals. The financial problems currently experienced by many African countries can be attributed to market access problems, declining trends for world commodity prices, the slow industrialization pace of African economies due to the imbalances in the multilateral trading system, problems of transfer of technology and the digital divide.

In spite of the many debt initiatives, Sierra Leone, like many other countries, has not found an exit from the debt trap.

We therefore support the view that a holistic approach should be adopted to address these issues. We would like to see joint efforts between the WTO, the World Bank and the IMF in

addressing global economic policies and the focus on mainstreaming trade in our development process.

At Doha, we expressed reservations to the inclusion of the Singapore issues in the programme of work of the WTO and the current round of negotiations. The point was made that the Singapore issues needed further clarification and that any decision on the commencement of negotiations on them would require an explicit consensus on the modalities in this Ministerial Conference. It remains clear that there still exists significant differences in the views of Members on many elements. This being the case, we would continue to note the desire for this issue to be discussed but at a more appropriate time after sufficient clarifications have been made. Meanwhile, we will join others in developing a framework for future negotiations.

What we want to achieve in this Session is a multilateral trading system that is not only pro-growth but also pro-poor and emphasizing poverty reduction. We want to continue to work in a WTO that is transparent and all-inclusive and one that effectively ensures compliance on issues of rights and obligations for all Members - both rich and poor.

Sierra Leone wants to ensure that the benefits of globalization and liberalization reach the majority of its citizens so as to alleviate poverty and help consolidate the peace that we now enjoy. We want to see an effective system that will lead to market access for our products.

To enable us to produce competitive products, Sierra Leone needs capacity-building both in terms of the rebuilding of infrastructure and human resource development.

Though we have expressed disappointment in the lack of progress made in some areas of extreme significance to developing countries, we believe in this Ministerial Conference's decisive political guidance what will ensure meaningful progress. To this end we welcome the recent decision on TRIPS and public health that would make poor countries access cheap generic drugs for HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and other diseases. We hope that the system that is being put in place will address the urgent legitimate needs of our people without it being stifled by bureaucratic procedures.

We strongly support the initiative taken by African countries on cotton subsidy and commodity price stabilization.

My delegation is confident that under your astute leadership, the development work programme will remain in focus and that by the end of this Fifth WTO Ministerial Conference, we would collectively have found significant solutions to some of the contentious issues.
