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SOLOMON ISLANDS

Statement by Mr Robert Sisilo
Ambassador to the European Union

1. I thank you, Mr. Chairman, and your Government for hosting this Ministerial Conference and for the warm hospitality.
2. And I welcome the delegations of the People's Republic of China and Taiwan to our midst.
3. On the draft Ministerial Declaration before us my delegation appreciates the challenge that the Chairman and the Director-General have faced and the reasons that have led them to present us with a shorter text than that presented to the last Ministerial Conference in Seattle. My delegation recognizes the particular difficulty of reaching agreement on all the details in a long text.
4. However, the text must effectively accommodate the interests of all the Members, including small and least-developed countries like my own. And this is where having a voice in Geneva would have certainly helped. But because of limited resources this is simply not possible.
5. We are grateful for the help already offered in this respect, but we should agree that further concrete help will be provided to ensure that Members with very limited resources can be represented in Geneva.
6. We should also agree that WTO technical assistance should aim at overcoming obstacles to our participation in the WTO, and that it will benefit immediately from a higher level of funding on a secure and predictable basis. We believe that the work programme should not be expanded before these points are dealt with satisfactorily.
7. With regards to the current work programme the WTO must surely reach agreement on issues of vital interest to its Members before this is expanded. Two points will illustrate our interests.
8. The first issue of critical concern to our export sector is approval of the request for a waiver of the ACP-EU Partnership Agreement as called for in the ACP Declaration on the Fourth Ministerial Conference. This is long overdue and it is time we pronounce favourably on it.
9. And second, Solomon Islands urges WTO Members to agree to the accession of Vanuatu on the terms set out in its February 2000 accession package. This package goes far beyond those accepted by any least-developed Member of this Organization.
10. WTO Members should also agree on concrete steps to make the accession process less onerous. Here we call upon WTO Members to formally accept a fast-track process of accession for LDCs and small vulnerable States.

11. We are not opposed in principle to a new round of negotiations, but remain to be convinced that we would obtain net benefits from the expanded negotiations proposed in the present text.

12. We remain to be convinced, for instance, that the Organization should negotiate new agreements on rules. The large number of Members who have little bargaining power and small delegations, including least-developed country Members like my own, will not be able to follow all the details of the negotiations and can expect to exercise little influence on the final text.

13. It is therefore essential for us to ensure that provisions effectively accommodating our interests are spelled out with as much clarity as necessary from the outset, in the texts launching any new work or expanded negotiations.

14. If there is one resource that Solomon Islands can claim and even boast to have in relative abundance, it is fish. Thanks to the trade preferences of the Lomé Convention and the Cotonou Agreement, we have been able to exploit that advantage and attract significant investment in our fisheries sector. But as the commercial value of trade preferences are now greatly diminished by the effects of trade liberalization, investment in that sector will decrease. This will result in further losses in jobs and much needed revenue.

15. We should therefore recognize that trade preferences are an important instrument in the integration of least-developed countries in the multilateral trading system. And provision for effective and binding special and differential treatment with less than full reciprocity need to be incorporated. Sweet words are just not good enough. They have to be backed by binding commitments.

16. While we share many of the problems of other developing countries, we also have unique problems as a small island developing State. These have been highlighted in the statement made by Mauritius yesterday and to which my delegation fully subscribes.

17. These are problems of distance, small market and resource base, lack of economies of scale, and vulnerability to name some. This Conference has to recognize them if our leap of faith onto that bandwagon we call "trade liberalization" is to be underpinned by a certain level of confidence.
