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Statement by H.E. Baroness Liz Symons of Vernham Dean
Minister of State for Trade and Industry

Mr Chairman, I am pleased to be able to address you here today.

I would like to join others in thanking His Highness the Emir and his Government for their splendid hospitality and the excellent arrangements they have made for hosting this Conference.

We face a real challenge in the days ahead. A challenge that needs close cooperation, strong leadership and mutual understanding from us all.

It is clear that we stand on the brink of a worldwide economic downturn. And this in a world where we see every day that events in one nation impact on us all. Our response must therefore be global. We cannot retreat into isolation and protectionism. To do so would be a disaster. Instead, we must demonstrate our common resolve and inject new confidence in the global economy by launching a new WTO round.

As we seek to steer this Ministerial Conference to a successful conclusion we must have clearly in our minds the need to launch negotiations which are relevant to and which benefit the world's poorest countries and fully integrate them into the global economy.

Studies show how significant a round could be. If all WTO Members were to cut all trade barriers in half the world could benefit to the tune of some US\$400 billion a year, around 1.4 per cent of global GDP. Of this around US\$150 billion would accrue to developing countries.

The UK is committed to ensuring that this round is truly a "Development Round".

What does this mean? I very much agree with the comments made earlier by my colleague Pascal Lamy. Developing countries have much to gain from being part of an open, rules-based trading system. Equally they would have much to lose if that system were to be placed in jeopardy.

Free trade is not a one-way street – developed countries cannot demand more openness from others without offering it ourselves. And the more developing countries are prepared to open their markets to each other the more we think they will benefit.

We understand the obstacles many developing countries face in participating fully in the work of the WTO and taking advantage of the opportunities it offers. Just this week, the UK demonstrated its commitment to addressing these capacity constraints.

Clare Short, the UK Development Minister, announced a £20 million package of new measures. And Tony Blair, the UK Prime Minister, wrote to Horst Kohler of the International Monetary Fund and James Wolfensohn of the World Bank urging both to commit their organizations to provide financial support to least-developed countries working to open their own markets. He also urged them to step up Bank and Fund efforts to build trade capacity.

When it comes to the substance of our talks this week, the UK, together with our EU partners, will be seeking an ambitious negotiating agenda. And for good reasons.

Within the WTO, Members set global rules that order and stabilize international trade. But significant barriers still remain – going beyond tariffs and quotas. Lack of transparency in investment and competition rules still holds back international trade. Cumbersome customs procedures sometimes do the same. None of us – whether developed or developing – can make the most of our trading links until we remove these barriers.

We must also extend the rules-based trading system – bringing more countries into the WTO. The accession ceremonies that we will witness this evening and tomorrow are welcome steps in this direction.

We have a clear challenge facing us here in Doha – to launch a short, decisive, and successful round of trade negotiations. A round that delivers for developing countries. A round that aims to reduce poverty. A round which improves market access for all and which seeks to build the capacity developing countries need to participate effectively in the WTO and reap the benefit of that market access.

We must all face up to the challenges ahead. The WTO cannot afford to miss this opportunity.
