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## BANGLADESH

Statement by H.E. Mr Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury  
Minister for Commerce

My delegation joins me in extending to Your Excellency Mr Youssef Hussain Kamal our heartiest congratulations on your assumption of the Chair of our Meeting. I also congratulate His Excellency Mr Mike Moore, Director-General of the WTO, for his leadership in the WTO and in ably assisting us for this Meeting. May I take this opportunity to thank the Government of Qatar for the excellent arrangements made in this beautiful city of Doha, and for their warm and generous hospitality.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Meeting in Doha comes at a critical juncture of the world economic scene. The terrorist attacks of 11 September, which all of us have condemned in the strongest possible terms, have accentuated the process and pace of recession that was already being felt around the globe. In this interdependent world of today, what happens in one country or region may affect others. We, in Bangladesh, have already started feeling the ripple effects. Orders for many of our export products, particularly in the apparel and frozen food sectors, have plummeted. Reduced market demand in developed countries will severely affect our development programmes, particularly those for poverty alleviation. Other LDCs across the globe are also likely to be fraught with similar experiences at the turn of events.

It is imperative that this Ministerial must find ways and means to assist the low-income countries that are least able to weather the recessionary storm.

Bangladesh is a member of the least-developed country group. Along with other members of the group, we have placed foreign trade at the core of our development strategy. Since the early 1990s, we have liberalized our economy very fast and have opened up much more than similarly situated countries. May I highlight some important features to illustrate my point. For example, between the early 1990s and 2000, we have:

- (a) Reduced the number of tariff slabs from 17 to only four;
- (b) reduced the import tariff from 350 per cent to 37.5 per cent;
- (c) reduced the number of banned import items (at the four-digit HS code) from 239 to 129;
- (d) provided a five-year export and import policy, for predictability and certainty;
- (e) eliminated import licensing, etc.

These policies have had their impact, and exports and imports now constitute about one-third of our GNP. While this has helped open doors, much to our dismay, we have also become extremely vulnerable to changes in the external environment.

LDCs attach great importance to increased access for their products. In fact, Bangladesh has been strongly pleading for total market access, without any tariff and non-tariff barrier, for all our products, into the developed country markets. The LDCs' share of world trade has fallen from 0.7 per cent in 1990 to 0.4 per cent in 1999. There are indications that this downward trend is continuing, and we must act together to reverse it. Increased market access is the only way to prevent further marginalization of the LDCs in world trade.

Based on our experience over the past few decades, I will list the issues that we consider most critical to enable the LDCs to expand their exports:

- (a) Meaningful market access in all developed countries for all products of the LDCs, with duty-free and quota-free access;
- (b) the Rules of Origin for LDC products need to be appropriately revised to match our industrial capacity; otherwise, any market access given will remain paper commitments;
- (c) interpreting and implementing existing WTO provisions in a manner favourable to the needs of the LDCs;
- (d) apply standstill on any contingency protection measure, including anti-dumping, on market access for export products of LDCs into the markets of developed countries;
- (e) on exports of apparel provide LDCs immediate duty-free and quota-free entry, as appropriate, into the markets of the developed countries. The implementation of the ATC has placed us in an unfavourable position, and corrective measures are necessary. We are concerned that in the post-MFA situation, existing as well as new apparel-exporting LDCs may lose their market share. ATC did allude to such possibility and allow safeguard measures. We need to design new instruments to halt further marginalization of the LDCs in global trade, e.g. through a capping mechanism on apparel export to avoid market disruptive surges from textile-related resource endowed sources;
- (f) temporary movement of natural persons for productive purposes, must be allowed, just as we allow movement of capital, the other factor of production;
- (g) technical and financial assistance should be meaningful and designed to meet LDCs' supply-side bottlenecks.

I look forward to seeing the countries represented at Doha, to meet the genuine needs of LDCs, through appropriate provisions in the Draft Declaration and in the decisions on implementation issues. We must boldly build upon the past decisions and move forward. Going back from what was earlier agreed will help neither the LDCs nor our development partners.

I do not want to prejudge consensus to promote trade through new multilateral rules in areas that are not covered by the WTO. Nor do I want to oppose the discussion in any area provided it is approached from the perspective of promoting trade and not used as a new conditionality in trade. What would help is to provide for non-reciprocal commitments from our side along with realistic transition periods before the rules become applicable to us.

LDCs may participate in such discussions, based on consensus to the best of our ability and competence. Given the low exposure and expertise in many matters, special efforts have to be there to make the negotiations and multilateral framework more inclusive and participatory. It would harm our countries if we are excluded from the process. Furthermore, to advance the cause of consensus-building, the current Ministerial should instruct on an effective mechanism to address the commitments in favour of the LDCs made earlier at various WTO platforms.

Only last month, Bangladesh went through general elections. The people gave a massive mandate to a four-party alliance led by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, which I represent. More than two-thirds of the members of the new Parliament are from our Alliance. This has given an opportunity to the new Prime Minister, Begum Khaleda Zia, to chart a course for the social and economic development of Bangladesh over the next five years. Trade will continue to play an important role in this process. I seek the active intervention of countries represented here to facilitate our meaningful participation in world trade.

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