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CÔTE D'IVOIRE

Statement by H.E. Mr Kplohrou Eric Kahe
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It is a great honour for me to express the sincere gratitude of the Government of Côte d'Ivoire and the delegation here with me, to His Highness the Emir and the Government of Qatar for having agreed to host the Fourth Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization (WTO), and for the warm and friendly hospitality we have received since arriving in Doha.

As well as congratulating H.E. Mr Youssef Hussein Kamal on his election as Chairperson of the Fourth WTO Ministerial Conference, I would like to thank the Director-General, Mr Mike Moore, and the WTO Secretariat, for having given genuine momentum to the preparations for this Conference.

The Doha Conference provides us with an opportunity to take a retrospective look at the multilateral trading system, which should be based on the principle of fair trade among its Member countries.

In our view, the World Trade Organization is capable of helping to narrow the gap between North and South, given its stated aims, which include the achievement of full employment, real income growth and sustainable development. These noble objectives can only be achieved by respecting the principles of non-discrimination, fair competition and free trade.

The numerous requests for accession to the WTO, including that of China, to which I extend my warmest congratulations, are testimony to the vitality of this Organization and to the increasing confidence placed in it by States.

The success of the Doha Ministerial depends on the initiation of genuine dialogue and the commencement of balanced trade negotiations between North and South, as opposed to a situation in which the developing countries are mere spectators or foils in the trade confrontations between the powerful economic blocs that divide up world trade, to the exclusion of the countries of the South, through the medium of subsidies and customs duties.

Thus, while we have witnessed sustained growth in international trade over the past 50 years, many WTO Members, including those in Africa, have seen a fall in their market share of world trade. The results obtained through reforms have been painful and have failed to satisfy the expectations of our people. All the analyses of the multilateral trading system have shown that our continent has been marginalized. Consequently, the slow-down in international economic activity only exacerbates our concerns.

Can we really welcome the opportunity of a new round of negotiations without carrying out a review of the existing trade agreements, which means resolving implementation issues? On the delicate issue of the launch of a new round, our response must emerge from a spirit of true partnership.

The tragic events of 11 September in the United States of America, in respect of which my country, Côte d'Ivoire, through the voice of its President, H.E. Mr Laurent Gbagbo, was one of the first nations to express its compassion and solidarity to the American people, has served as a reminder that the world is but a global village. Any upheaval affecting a small part of this village is felt by the whole of the community. And while we have all, by organizing this Conference, refused to suffer the intimidation and worldwide recession that would have resulted had we postponed it, we should not forget that, in the minds of the perpetrators, the poverty of others provides justification for their violence. Therefore, one of the main thrusts of our response to that violence must be to eliminate poverty and to promote social cohesion throughout the world.

Indeed, as Mr James Wolfensohn, the President of the World Bank, pointed out in his appeal of 9 October last for a global coalition against poverty, poverty is not in itself an immediate and direct source of conflict, even less of terrorism. Rather than reacting to their destitution by inflicting violence on others, all over the world, an overwhelmingly large number of disadvantaged populations put all their energy into a daily struggle to secure income, food and prospects for the future of their children. Unfortunately, poverty is a factor that triggers civil war and countries in conflict quickly become shelters for terrorists.

As the successor to the GATT, for certain African countries, the WTO inherited a number of weaknesses in the form of malfunctioning, as these countries did not take part in the initial negotiations, for most of them had not yet become independent at the time. This has resulted in a serious imbalance between rich countries and a significant number of developing countries in terms of both the letter and the spirit of the Agreements.

Without in any way questioning the noble ambitions of the WTO, as mentioned previously, it is necessary to remedy shortcomings in the fields of implementation, agriculture and the thorny issue of export subsidies and domestic support, special and differential treatment, capacity-building, and transparency of rules and procedures, trade-related intellectual property rights, and so forth. Côte d'Ivoire expresses its solidarity with the fair and equitable positions taken by Africa and the ACP and least-developed countries on the subject of these shortcomings.

Access of agricultural products to developed markets is hampered by tariff peaks, tariff escalation and technical barriers to trade, which aggravate inequalities to the detriment of our countries. Hence, we deplore trade-distorting measures such as export subsidies and domestic support which destabilize the market for agricultural products in favour of the developed countries.

The total elimination of tariff peaks and various forms of subsidy must be addressed as a matter of priority in the event of new negotiations.

Moreover, the efforts of farming populations, which account for 60 to 70 per cent of our overall population and are the linchpin of our development, are negated by the introduction of vegetable fats in chocolate manufacturing. We therefore consider it vital that the issue of labelling – among other measures aimed at ensuring transparency – should be addressed.

Despite its limited capacity to provide services, Côte d'Ivoire has undertaken autonomous liberalization within the context of structural adjustment and in accordance with the free trade principles advocated by the WTO. Liberalization in this sphere has thus essentially encouraged services exports from the developed to the developing countries, without the latter having enjoyed the benefits deriving from the commitments made by the developed countries in the services sector.

As to trade-related intellectual property rights, we deplore that the Agreement takes no account of the knowledge or the traditional ownership schemes of local communities. My delegation therefore supports protection of traditional knowledge that could be based on an appropriate system of access to the biological resources, knowledge and technologies of such communities. Better still, we firmly hope that the TRIPS Agreement will help resolve rather than aggravate the public health crises plaguing poor African countries, such as HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis.

Indeed, millions of people are dying every year as a result of these pandemics. Such loss of human life, which undermines the development aspirations of poor countries, poses a moral dilemma to humanity as a whole.

Lastly, the participation of sub-regional organizations, which play a key role in the development of Members, is also an issue of vital concern to us. The success achieved by the European Union is quite enlightening in this regard. We view the free movement of persons, goods, capital and services advocated by the WAEMU and ECOWAS as an opportunity for Members. This is why Côte d'Ivoire proposes a high degree of flexibility in conditions for the full and unrestricted access of sub-regional groups of developing countries to the WTO.

To conclude, I remain convinced that our deliberations will advance the cause of free trade and economic growth, while accommodating the concerns of all Members, and will hence enable us to rise effectively to new challenges for the benefit of all humankind.
