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BAHRAIN

Statement Circulated by H.E. Mr Ali Saleh Al-Saleh Minister of Commerce and Industry

My delegation and I are pleased to be in Doha for this important Conference. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate His Highness the Amir, the Government and the people of the State of Qatar, on behalf of His Highness the Amir, the Government and the people of the State of Bahrain for the success in organizing and preparing for this globally important Conference. We would also like to extend our gratitude for the kind reception given to all participating delegations.

The Government of the State of Bahrain fully supports this important global Conference and looks forward to its successful and fruitful outcome.

This Conference is held against a backdrop of a slowing world economy and the onset of recession, resulting in lower investments, increased unemployment, reduced trade levels and exchange rate fluctuations. All these factors have a negative impact on political and economic stability of countries, and make it difficult to fulfil ambitions of increasing the rate of economic development.

In the present climate, and following on from the failure of Seattle, it is extremely important that the Doha Declaration should include resolutions aimed at reviving the world economy and be in the balanced interests of all Member countries, regardless of their stage of economic and social development.

The State of Bahrain, being a small island developing country, has adopted openness as an economic development policy. Our position as an international and regional financial, tourist and trade centre, draws strength from open markets, providing us with the ability to attract inward investment. At the same time, we feel that the multilateral trading system should provide us with easy access to foreign markets.

The agenda of this Conference includes many topics that are of extreme importance to all Members of the WTO and I would like to outline Bahrain's position towards the most important of these issues:

- The State of Bahrain supports the launch of a new round of trade negotiations which should be transparent and provide for the effective participation of all Member countries, particularly taking into consideration the economic development plans of developing and least-developed countries. The mechanism should ensure the implementation of commitments already made by developed countries according to the Uruguay Round and provide for the continuation of special and differential treatment for developing countries.

- We support the position of most developing countries that a comprehensive review of implementation of the Uruguay Round Agreements should be carried out. We also believe that extensions of implementation periods for developing countries be considered. The texts of some agreements need to be modified to serve the interests of developing countries and to provide a transparent framework.

As far as the new issues, Bahrain's position is as follows:

1. We support the possibility of establishing negotiations on trade and investment, within a framework like the GATS, and provided that the interests of developing countries are fully provided for, in particular concerning the transfer of technology, and where appropriate the provision of technical and financial assistance to developing countries.
2. On trade and competition, we are of the opinion that the working group concerned with this topic should continue its task and submit its final recommendations to the General Council.
3. We support negotiating an agreement on transparency in government procurement provided that the Agreement aims to provide general guidelines only, and that the text is not subject to the Dispute Settlement Mechanism.
4. We believe that it is premature to include electronic commerce as a topic in any new round of negotiations. We would rather focus at this stage on the provision of technical assistance to developing countries and emphasize the importance of supporting these countries to develop their infrastructures to comply with the requirements of electronic commerce. We also support the continuation of implementing the resolution taken at the Geneva Ministerial Conference in 1998 on not imposing customs duties on electronic transmissions.
5. The State of Bahrain is fully committed to international standards and laws which aim to preserve the environment. However, we emphasize the importance of not using environmental standards as a new barrier against exports of developing countries.
6. As regards trade and labour standards, we emphasize that the ILO is the right forum for tackling this topic which had been agreed at the First Ministerial Conference in Singapore.
7. Trade facilitation is important, and we appreciate the efforts made by the WTO, UNCTAD and other organizations in this regard and support the continuation of these efforts in addition to intensifying technical assistance to developing countries in general to build capacity and improve international trade flows.

As for the topics under the Built-in Agenda, specifically, the Agreements on Agriculture and the GATS, we stress the importance of activating the Ministerial Resolution on developing and least-developed net food-importing countries, and developing a mechanism for that purpose.

In order to activate such a resolution, the State of Bahrain welcomes technical assistance from developed countries and international organizations specialized in intensifying agricultural production. We also believe that it is necessary to Implement Article IV (4) of the GATS on capacity-building in services infrastructures of developing countries, including improving access to information networks and technology transfer.

Since current negotiations on this Agreement involve increased commitments on Member States, it is important to take into account the level of development capacity of these countries. The liberalization of services in these countries should also be on a gradual basis.

We would like to emphasize the importance of speeding up negotiations on the accession of developing and least-developed countries to the WTO. We should not require these countries to make commitments more than those of existing Member States. It is equally important that technical assistance should be provided, and that the special and differential treatment to these countries should be retained. Therefore, Article XII (12) of the Agreement establishing the WTO should be adjusted and clarified to that extent. At the same time the culture and ethics of these countries should also be considered in accordance with Article XX (20) of the GATT 1994.

We very much regret that the request submitted by the Arab League to participate in this Conference as an observer, has not been accepted by the WTO. This request was supported by all Arab States which are Members of the WTO as well as those in the process of accession. It is our hope that this matter will be reconsidered.

We would also request the accreditation of the Arabic language as an official language in the WTO in addition to the three present official languages. We believe that this would contribute to a better understanding and awareness of the activities of this Organization and of the multilateral trading system by Arab countries.

Finally, before ending, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the People's Republic of China as well as the other countries that have recently become Members of the WTO.
