

WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

WT/MIN(03)/ST/132
13 September 2003

(03-4911)

MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE
Fifth Session
Cancún, 10 - 14 September 2003

Original: French

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

Statement by H.E. Mrs Yacinthe Wodobode
Minister of Commerce, Industry and Promotion of the Private Sector

The delegation of the Central African Republic wishes to greet the Mexican authorities and express its sincere congratulations to them and to the WTO Secretariat on the success of this Fifth Ministerial Conference, marked by the accession of Cambodia and Nepal.

We also sympathize with the Swedish people on the loss they have suffered as a result of the tragic death of the Minister for Foreign Affairs.

On this occasion, I should like to call on all my fellow women Ministers in this room to pursue our struggle to occupy posts of responsibility and make a greater contribution to eliminating all forms of violence against women in the world.

At the current stage of our work, I should like to express my delegation's concerns regarding the following subjects of negotiation:

Sectoral initiative on cotton

The Central African delegation adds its voice to that of other delegations which support the sectoral initiative on cotton.

The Central African Republic is a cotton-producing country and despite its considerable natural potential following a number of reforms in this sector, it is still today facing considerable difficulties in this sector, which employs a large part of the rural population accounting for over 60 per cent of the country's inhabitants.

This is why my country took part in the meeting of Ministers for Trade of West and Central African-cotton producing countries held in Ougadougou, Burkina Faso, in June 2003.

The Central African Government attaches importance to this sector, particularly because cotton-growing is an important factor in food security in my country as subsistence crops and cotton are complementary.

Nevertheless, in order to reach equitable solutions, it is also extremely important to dissociate the cotton issue as set out in the sectoral initiative on cotton, which we support, and the suggestion of linking cotton and artificial fibres, as proposed by the major industrial producers of cotton.

In the countries supporting the African initiative, cotton is produced by small farmers without large resources, whereas artificial fibres are produced by industrial enterprises that often occupy a dominant position as a result of their technological and financial power.

The delegation of the Central African Republic therefore urges all those who support the sectoral initiative on cotton constantly to bear in mind the fact that textiles and clothing made from artificial fibres are artificial products and are very different from textiles and clothing made from cotton, which is a natural product.

Consequently, these two products, namely artificial fibres and cotton, must be dealt with separately and any association of the two runs the risk of creating divergency and even a lack of solidarity.

Cotton is so soft and I do not understand why dealing with the question is so hard!

As regards the following:

Access to essential medicines

The delegation of the Central African Republic welcomes the decision to authorize access to essential medicines for countries that lack manufacturing facilities. It hopes that this decision will be implemented in practice and benefit poor countries.

Special and differential treatment

The delegation of the Central African Republic also has concerns regarding the review of the provisions on special and differential treatment with a view to strengthening them and making them more advantageous for the least-developed countries, which are facing great difficulties in formulating trade policies, effectively participating in negotiations, and implementing the multilateral trade agreements.

At Cancún, but above all, after Cancún 2003, I ask you not to turn away from such essential issues as the sectoral initiative on cotton, effective access to essential medicines for populations in poor countries, and the in-depth reform of special and differential treatment to which I have just referred.

I thank you for your kind attention.
