

# WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

WT/MIN(98)/ST/72

18 May 1998

(98-2080)

**MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE**  
**Second Session**  
**Geneva, 18 and 20 May 1998**

Original: English/  
French

## ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN UNITY/ AFRICAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY

### Joint Statement Circulated by Ministers of Trade

As Ministers responsible for international trade matters in African countries, recalling our meeting in Harare, Zimbabwe from 8 to 9 April 1998, we jointly make the following statement on the occasion of the 2nd Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization (WTO):

1. We reaffirm the importance of the multilateral trading system, now institutionalized by the WTO, as a necessary framework for the beneficial conduct of international trade relations. Noting that the 2nd Ministerial Conference of the WTO takes place on the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the multilateral trading system, we recall the noble objectives of the system of achieving higher living standards, and growth in production and trade in Member countries, according to their needs and different levels of economic development.
2. While acknowledging the system's contribution over the past 50 years to economic growth, we reaffirm the importance of a non-discriminatory, open, fair and equitable multilateral trading system (MTS). We recognize that the MTS presents many opportunities and challenges to developing countries. However, the declining share of African countries in international trade is a matter of grave concern. We also note with concern the continuing inequities in the distribution of benefits of the MTS among countries and regions. Consequently, we should reassess the performance of the system and our experiences in the last 50 years.
3. In particular, we bring to the 2nd Session of the WTO Ministerial Conference our heightened concern at the fact that our continent continues to be bypassed with regard to the benefits of the remarkable growth and greater global economic integration of recent years, and hence continues to experience marginalization from the global economy.
4. In addition to our own domestic efforts at effecting growth-oriented economic changes and pursuing meaningful integration into the global economy, we call for further integrated multilateral initiatives aimed at arresting the marginalization of our continent and at ensuring that our countries share equitably in the benefits of the system.
5. In this connection, we welcome the integrated initiative for least-developed countries adopted at last October's High Level Meeting (HLM) held pursuant to the decision taken at the WTO's First Ministerial Conference in Singapore in 1996. We call for the effective implementation of the results of the HLM.

6. We commend the steps by several WTO Members, including the more advanced developing countries, in announcing autonomous market access offers to least-developed countries in the framework of the HLM on integrated initiatives for least-developed countries' trade development.

7. However, the market access offers that were made during the HLM were autonomous and non-contractual. Moreover, these offers require evaluation to determine the net effect on LDCs, individually and collectively.

8. We draw attention to the all but forgotten proposal of the Director-General of the WTO for duty-free treatment of products originating from LDCs. We urge the full implementation of this proposal. In this context, we welcome the report of the Director-General on the outcome of the HLM and follow-up to the integrated initiative.

9. Recalling that 33 out of the 48 least-developed countries are in Africa, we attach great importance to appropriate follow-up to the UNCTAD, WTO and ITC integrated initiative, including the provision of adequate budgetary and extra-budgetary financial resources for this purpose.

10. We further call for the following:

- The extension of the results of the HLM and the integrated initiative to all African countries;
- the provision of focused technical assistance to help African countries overcome their difficulties in implementing their obligations and exercising their rights in terms of the WTO Agreement;
- increased market access in areas of specific export interest to African countries; and
- measures to deal decisively with country-specific situations including - small and remote island economies, land-locked economies, low-income indebted countries and subregional constraints to supply response to improved market access.

11. We reaffirm our commitment to the achievement of the universality of the MTS as soon as possible. The rapid accession of countries seeking to become WTO members through a transparent process, will contribute to the achievement to this goal. The terms of accession of these countries should be in accordance with WTO rules, in particular the provisions related to special and differential treatment to developing countries in the MTS.

12. While we reaffirm our commitment to the multilateral trading system, we reassert the important role played by regional trading arrangements, particularly in our continent, in increasing our trade and hence promoting our integration into the global economy and multilateral trading system.

13. In this connection, we recall that the rules and disciplines of the multilateral trading system contained vital provisions in respect of regional trade arrangements among developing countries. We underscore the importance we continue to attach to these provisions which will remain necessary in enabling greater and beneficial integration of our countries in the global economy and multilateral trading system.

14. We stress that full and effective implementation of the multilateral trade agreements and ministerial decisions under the WTO is critical to realizing the objectives of the multilateral trading system.

15. Whilst remaining committed to implementing our multilateral trade obligations, we underscore the difficulties we face in effecting the adjustments to our economies and policies required by these obligations. In particular, the institutions and human resources for trade administration in our countries have been severely stretched by the demands of implementing our obligations and exercising our rights in the multilateral trading system.

16. We are particularly concerned that the implementation of many of the vital provisions in favour of developing and least-developed countries in the various Agreements and Ministerial Decisions embodied in the Final Act of the Uruguay Round - such as the Decision on Measures concerning the Possible Negative Effects of the Reform Programme on Least-Developed and Net-Food Importing Developing Countries are either slow or remain to be effected.

17. We are equally concerned at the abuse of trade measures in such areas as anti-dumping, technical barriers, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, and the environment.

18. While commending the commitment to expanding and strengthening the multilateral trading system by those of our countries that participated in the negotiations on basic telecommunications and financial services in the framework of the General Agreement on Trade in Services, we also note with concern that our countries are yet to realize the benefits from the liberalization of trade in services.

19. We are further concerned about the weakness of Africa's participation in the WTO's policy-making processes and at the inadequacy of its representation in the WTO's management structures.

20. We are further concerned that our continental organization, the Organization of African Unity/African Economic Community (OAU/AEC), has not been granted observer status in WTO bodies as yet. In view of the economic mandate of our Organization and its key role in advocacy, technical backstopping, facilitating information sharing among African countries not represented in Geneva, and in coordinating our responses to trade policy matters, we call on the Ministerial Conference to take a speedy decision to resolve this matter.

21. As the WTO maps our future activities, it is imperative that completing the implementation of commitments under the Uruguay Round Final Act, particularly those provisions in favour of our countries and other developing and least-developed countries be the central priority of our work.

22. In this connection, an important part of the preparatory process for future activities we shall launch during the 2nd Ministerial Conference should be the undertaking of a comprehensive review of implementation, with a view to making recommendations at the next session of the Conference on how the gains anticipated by the Uruguay Round Agreements, especially in favour of our countries, can be realized.

23. We continue to attach great importance to the objective of sustained economic growth and sustainable development which must cut across all the WTO Agreements and rules. In this connection, we note the deepening of work in the WTO Committee on Trade and Environment and support the expeditious fulfilment of the Committee's mandate. However, we remain opposed to all forms of protectionism under the guise of environmental protection.

24. We recognize that the rapid pace of global economic integration intensifies the need to ensure that the multilateral trading system evolves in a coherent framework which more effectively reflects the interdependence between international trade, money and finance, while responding to the imperative of reversing marginalization and achieving economic development in our countries. In this regard, we attach a great importance to the regional economic integration process.

25. We note that we meet at a time when the economies of a number of WTO Members are experiencing difficulties due to volatilities in financial and capital markets. This development, in addition to the persistence of the foreign debt problem and instabilities in commodity markets which continue to hamper stable and sustained growth in our economies, underscores the continued shortcomings in the global economy.

26. This underscores the imperative to give impetus to the implementation of the Marrakesh Declaration on the Contribution of the WTO to Achieving Greater Coherence in Global Economic Policymaking.

27. The problem of continued marginalization and the need for full and effective integration of our economies in the multilateral trading system, makes it imperative that the development dimension and the principle of special and differential treatment of developing countries continue to be upheld in future negotiations and reviews, both as mandated in existing WTO Agreements, and as may be required to enhance the development prospects of developing countries.

28. As the global and multilateral trading system enters the 21st century, the test of its success will be its ability to meaningfully integrate our countries in a manner responsive to the vulnerabilities of our economies and our development needs.

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