

MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE
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LEAST-DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

Statement Circulated by Ministers of the Least-Developed Countries

The LDC Ministers express their deep concern that the share of LDCs in world exports continues to be under 0.04 per cent resulting in their marginalization in world trade. This painful state of affairs is taking place in the backdrop of the Paris Declaration and the Programme of Action for LDCs and the WTO Plan of Action adopted at the First Ministerial Meeting of WTO, held in Singapore in December 1996, which provides a framework for further market access concessions to LDCs and recalling further the outcome of the High-Level Meeting on the Integrated Initiatives for LDCs' Trade Development held in Geneva in October 1997.

We call upon our development partners to give operational content to the WTO Plan of Action and the integrated framework adopted in the High Level Meeting through enhanced ODA flows and provision of zero tariff access for LDCs' products in their markets. We further urge expeditious implementation of the special and differential measures in favour of LDCs as contained in the Final Act of the Uruguay Round.

Our development partners are urged to support UNCTAD's Integrated Country Programme (ICP) for Trade-Related Technical Assistance through increased provision of technical and financial assistance.

We urge Members to consider flexibility to WTO rules to enable smooth accession by acceding LDCs. LDCs may be granted membership on submission of Memorandum on Foreign Trade and subsequent clarifications, if any, by acceding member. We highly regard the value of the WTO technical assistance to LDCs and underscore the need for its enhancement.

We reiterate that the external debt situation of LDCs remains precarious and that current debt relief measures have proved too inadequate. We consider the HIPC initiative of the World Bank and IMF as a step in the right direction. However, the effectiveness of the initiative will depend on the speed and extent of its implementation. While a majority of LDCs are included under the HIPC which we appreciate the case of the LDCs should also be considered in similar light.

We express our deep appreciation to those countries that in the October 1998 HLM announced improved market access for exports from least-developed countries. We encourage them to follow-up with notifications in this regard speedily. We request other WTO Members to reconsider their position in this regard, and make generous market access offers.

We recommend to all multinational and regional finance organizations and bilateral/multilateral donors to give special attention to the building of infrastructure (power, ports, telecom, roads, rails, airports, hotels etc.) which enhance the attractiveness of LDC economies to foreign investments.

We welcome the proposal by the Director-General of the WTO to consider, in the preparation for the Third Ministerial Conference, proposal for elimination of all tariff barriers in favour of the least-developed countries on a priority basis in the negotiations, starting in 2000.

The time-frame established for the compliance of the provisions in the Agreement is not sufficient for LDCs. Additional time should be granted to LDCs for the compliance of the provisions of the different Agreements.
