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RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Statement by H.E. Mr. Mikhail Fradkov Minister of Trade of the Russian Federation

(Speaking as an Observer)

The Russian Government welcomes this Ministerial Conference, gathered to launch the new round of multilateral trade negotiations.

As an acceding country we expect that this round should contribute to strengthening the Multilateral Trading System in a manner that would lead to achieving economic objectives sought by the nations of the world. A particular feature of this process is to allow the WTO to acquire, at the very start of the new millennium, a new dimension - that of a truly universal organization. In my view, it is quite a realistic assumption.

Evidently, such an accomplishment should benefit both the Members of the WTO and the acceding countries, Russia among them.

My country is fully determined to go its part of the road. I have sound reasons for such a statement. They include the maturing market economy, reinforced by ongoing transposition of WTO rules and principles into national trade legislation.

That is to say, we are doing our best to accelerate the accession process. We have tabled our proposals on industrial tariffs, agriculture and the offer on services, thereby covering all basic elements of the entire package to be negotiated. May I take this opportunity to confirm once again our willingness to intensify bilateral consultations and negotiations on these issues with all interested countries as well as the multilateral process within the scope of the WTO Agreements.

Like many other countries, Russia is continuously sharing trade liberalization efforts. In the course of the recent years Russia has been steadily reducing the overall level of tariff protection despite all the challenges arising from systemic reforms, aggravated by external shocks. Our intention is to follow this policy further.

Against this background, while being an observer country, we are prepared to take an active part in the forthcoming Millennium Round. We hope that the acceding countries will be entitled to full engagement in this process. Under the agenda to be set up here, in the city of Seattle, we would be willing to work constructively with other nations. Such a joint endeavour should advance market access and improve WTO rules for trade and trade related areas. In our view, it is fundamentally important to ensure herewith a balanced approach in our deliberations. The specific problems of developing countries need to be adequately addressed.

As far as my country is concerned, it is our hope that, with the good will of partner countries, in the course of this exercise we shall be able to complete our accession talks, and the commitments upon accession would form a contribution to the results of the new round.

Let me convey our sincere gratitude to our hosts - Federal, State and City authorities for their hospitality and support, as well as to the WTO Secretariat for their dedicated work.
