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TUNISIA

Statement by H.E. Mr Tahar Sioud
Minister of Commerce

I am especially pleased to see the splendid city of Doha host the Fourth Ministerial Conference of the WTO, as it is a powerful symbol of the Arab world's growing integration into the global economy.

On this occasion, I would sincerely like to thank the Qatari authorities for the warm welcome they have given us and to congratulate them on the successful organization of our work.

This Conference is taking place at a particularly sensitive time for international relations; it constitutes a major event for all nations which remain convinced of the importance of dialogue and cooperation with a view to working together to ensure a better future for all our countries and peoples.

This vision of shared responsibility should ensure that the management of globalization is based on fair rules and a more consistent commitment to development on the part of the international community.

The decisions we will take at the end of this Conference should reflect accurately the concerns of developing countries and provide appropriate solutions to the difficulties they face.

It is therefore necessary to ensure that provisions concerning developing countries, and that means all developing countries, are adapted to their effective capacity to implement them and to their efforts to bring about the development of their economies.

Giving concrete expression to the commitments made is also an essential feature of implementation and a guarantee of respect for the principle of equality of rights and obligations.

Special and differential treatment remains a fundamental principle of the multilateral trading system, whose rules must be strengthened by more practical measures that meet the aspirations of the countries concerned for increased participation in international trade.

I am pleased to note that the European Union has given central importance to development in the forthcoming negotiations.

In addition, several countries are in the process of negotiating their accession to the WTO or are considering doing so. As well as giving these countries the assurance of our support, we urge all our partners to facilitate their accession and to refrain from making demands or setting excessive or burdensome conditions for developing countries. The accession process must be transparent, structured and rapid.

On the same note, I would like to extend my warm congratulations to China on its signature, yesterday, of the protocol of accession to the WTO.

Tunisia is determined to contribute to the success of the Doha Conference and to help the emergence of a consensus on the issues raised by Member countries.

The interests of my country coincide exactly with the demands and concerns expressed by the African Group and the developing countries.

As regards implementation-related issues and concerns, the negotiating programme to be adopted must allow all developing countries to secure better access to the markets of developed countries, especially for goods and services that are particularly important exports.

The timetable for the negotiations must be compatible with the real possibilities of developing countries. The content of the programme should be consistent with the state of progress of the work under way in the various WTO structures.

Negotiations in the spheres of agriculture and services should also meet the aspirations of all while observing the provisions of the agreements and decisions already adopted.

The issue of health is of very special importance. The problems are crucial and pertain to access to medicines. This concerns all developing countries and not just one particular geographical area.

I would not like to miss this opportunity to lay emphasis on other issues of interest to my country, such as consistency in the drafting of world economic policies and the matter of indebtedness, which Tunisia had already raised during its presidency of the African Group in 1994. The same applies to the transfer of technology, including communications and information technologies.

The world has undergone sweeping economic changes, the effects of which are clear for all to see.

In parallel with the unprecedented advancement of world economic activity, which has undoubtedly improved mankind's standard of living, the first negative warning signs have appeared.

Many regions of the world are witnessing tragic situations on account of deepening poverty, mounting joblessness and the widening of the gap separating the rich and the poor of this world.

Tunisia is firmly convinced that human progress is an integral whole. It cannot be realized if the balance is broken, if there are widening gaps between the North and the South induced by two-track development in which vast regions are kept on the fringes of human progress.

A rules-based multilateral trading system as a vehicle of economic development must work for the integration of the countries in the South and help eliminate poverty.

President Ben Ali has attempted to eradicate this poverty from his country but is also working to eradicate it throughout the world by launching an appeal for the establishment of a world solidarity fund that would serve as a mechanism for securing mutual assistance and solidarity amongst peoples.

Such a fund would constitute a means by which to attenuate the acuteness of some side-effects of globalization and would also be an instrument for firmly entrenching the principles of development and solidarity.

My country has always underscored the virtues of dialogue and concerted action. The effective contribution by all Member countries to the elaboration of the rules of the multilateral trading system is in line with this approach.

Above all, we are determined to work towards the strengthening of consensus, a fundamental rule in the action of the WTO. This must continue to guide our current and future deliberations under the programme of work that we must carry out after Doha.

The close cooperation of all developed and developing countries is necessary to the success of our common endeavours and the strengthening of the role of trade as the engine of development.
