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Statement by the Honourable Mark Vaile, MP Minister for Trade

I am honoured to address this Conference.

This is an historical opportunity for the 146 Members of the WTO to make a real difference in the lives of the people we represent.

This week in Cancún, we can make decisions that will result in a modern, forward-looking global trading system that rewards efficiency, competitiveness and ingenuity,

We can provide the necessary conditions to stimulate economic growth and development for our least-developed Members. We can provide a much-needed injection of confidence for the global economy.

To achieve these outcomes, differences must be bridged and difficult decisions must be made. But if we are bold enough to make these decisions, we do have an historical opportunity to make a real difference.

Nearly two years ago in Doha, we launched the Doha Round of trade negotiations.

In launching that Round we set ourselves an ambitious but achievable mandate that reflected a careful balance of Members' interests.

As we come together again in Cancún, our job is to review how we are progressing in meeting that mandate and to provide a way forward for its completion by the end of next year.

Australia is more committed than ever to achieving the mandate we set for ourselves at Doha.

Our negotiations to date have demonstrated how difficult this will be. Deadlines have been missed and differences remain. But Australia remains ready to work with others to bridge those differences and reach a solution.

I welcome the hard work by General Council Chair Castillo to produce a draft Ministerial text for us.

However, we believe that the ambition in the text, particularly in agriculture and non-agricultural market access, falls well short of what will be required to meet the Doha mandate and unlock its potential.

Agriculture is critically important to Australia, to the Cairns Group and to many developing countries.

Achieving an ambitious outcome on agriculture is the key to the entire Doha Round Agenda and the key outcome to advance the economic prosperity of developing countries.

We cannot claim that the Doha Round is truly a Doha Development agenda unless we make some real progress on agriculture.

We will only accept an outcome that will result in a significant improvement in world agricultural trade.

Such an outcome must involve substantial cuts to existing levels of domestic support, substantial improvements in market access and elimination of export subsidies. We will be looking for an outcome that delivers on the far-reaching mandate for reform agreed by all WTO Members in Doha.

In meeting this mandate, we do not wish to introduce new areas of protection.

For this reason, Australia opposes proposals for negotiations in the Doha Round on the extension of higher levels of geographical indications protection beyond wines and spirits.

This issue is not covered by the Doha mandate. It has no place in these negotiations.

Australia is committed to an ambitious outcome from the negotiations on non-agricultural market access.

This outcome should cover both tariffs and non-tariff barriers, and deliver real improvements in market access for our exporters.

The draft Cancún Ministerial text is not specific enough on the core formula. Australia welcomes proposals for a simple, ambitious, comprehensive formula for tariff reductions to be applied to all non-agricultural products.

We need to do this to ensure that there are genuine improvements in market access.

Services is also a key issue for Australia.

We submitted our services offer last March and we encourage others who have not done so, to do so as soon as possible. The low numbers of services offers is disappointing.

All Members, whether developing or developed countries, both as importers and exporters of services, have much to gain from progressive liberalization in services sectors.

I warmly welcome the recent resolution of the issue of access to medicines. Finding, an effective way to address the public health concerns of developing countries was a moral obligation for all WTO Members. The decision adopted, two weeks ago will demonstrate that governments, through the WTO, can play their part in addressing broader global social policy issues.

Here in Cancún we are pleased to welcome Nepal and Cambodia to the WTO community. Australia is particularly pleased that these two countries are the first least-developed countries to join the WTO since it was established in 1995.

We are at a critical juncture in the history of trade negotiations.

Let me remind Members of the purpose of the multilateral trading system.

It is to open markets across the board. To maintain a stable framework of rules. To protect the weak from the strong so we can all trade fairly.

To move this Organization closer to these objectives, we must remain true to the mandate we have already set. We must bridge our differences and be bold enough to take the hard decisions.

The benefits will come in terms of improved economic growth, development and employment.

Then we will truly be able to say that we have provided the people of the world with a development agenda.
