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Statement Circulated by the Honourable Seymour Mullings,
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Fifty years ago, 23 countries concluded, albeit provisionally, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) with among other things, the objective of raising standards of living, ensuring full employment, achieving steady growth in real income, using fully and effectively the world's resources, and expanding production and trade in goods. 50 years later, we are still all striving to achieve these goals, particularly those of us from the developing and least-developed countries.

The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade has been successful in liberalizing trade and increasing the volume of goods traded. In eight rounds of multilateral trade negotiations, tariff and non-tariff barriers have been significantly reduced or eliminated. However, the major benefits of this liberalization process have not been equitably distributed. Trade between the equal and unequal has in many instances proven to be inequitable.

Developing countries, and particularly the least developed, have derived the least benefit from trade liberalization in spite of measures taken in the GATT, beginning in the 50's, to assist developing countries. These measures included the adoption in 1979 of the "Enabling Clause" which made the principle of special and differential treatment for developing countries a part of the GATT legal framework.

Trade remains the life blood of any economy. However, to be able to increase our volume of goods traded and our export earnings, it is necessary to be able to attract investment into the productive sectors, to modernize productive processes, fund research and development, and take advantage of market access opportunities. But investment, technology and market access cannot be gained and maintained, if the technical and legal expertise, and the proper institutional and physical infrastructures are not in place. This has been and continues to be a fundamental dilemma for many developing countries.

The end of the 20th century should see the WTO progressing toward universal membership making its membership more fully representative of the world's people at every level of development. This achievement should result in the WTO surmounting the perception, of its predecessor, the GATT, as an exclusive club catering to the needs of developed countries.

The High Level Conference held last October demonstrates that the WTO is conscious of the needs of the least-developed countries. We welcome the Plan of Action adopted during this Conference and hope that it will be implemented expeditiously.

However, there are other categories of developing countries caught between the emerging economies and the least developed, the needs of which are being overlooked. I make specific reference

to small developing economies which are facing the challenge of building their export and institutional capacities to allow them to become effective participants in the new highly competitive global environment and thus avoid marginalization.

If small developing economies are to be able to attract investment, expand production, improve product quality, meet standards, in short compete effectively and grasp the opportunities presented in the WTO Agreements, then it is imperative that their need for adequate transitional periods and for support be also recognized.

But, while we press for more attention to be paid to our particular concerns, we recognize that it is up to us to identify our problems, and articulate these in the WTO and other international organizations, working with them to ensure that we rise above our constraints.

One very troubling area is the experience we have had in the resolution of the dispute on the EC banana import regime. It has had an adverse impact on trade with our trading partners. We believe that there are some important principles and procedures requiring improvement as we begin the review of the Dispute Settlement Understanding (DSU). The so-called "systemic" complaints raised by a major trading partner, not only run the risk of upsetting the balance of rights and obligations, but also undermine the balance of benefits to developing countries, laboriously negotiated during the Uruguay Round.

The focus of the WTO, at this time, should be on implementation of the existing Agreements and the built-in agenda, and on closing the gap which exists between its Member States.

An essential requirement of this work programme should be an evaluation of the impact of the implementation of the Agreements to determine the benefits to or adverse effects on developing countries. Specifically, there should be an evaluation of the Agreement on Agriculture to determine the extent to which countries are meeting their reduction commitments and the impact on net-food-importing developing countries especially with regard to the Ministerial Decision on the possible negative effects of the reform programme on least developed and net-food-importing developing countries.

The Ministerial Declaration which launched the Uruguay Round in 1986 recognized the interrelationship between trade, money, finance and development and consequently, the negative effects of prolonged financial and monetary instability on trade liberalization. In 1996, the WTO entered into Agreements with the IMF and the World Bank to increase the exchange of information and bring about greater coherence in the policies being pursued in their organizations. The recent turmoil in international financial markets is a timely reminder that we should continue to give high priority to the interrelationship, and to ensure that short term capital flows do not lead to protectionist measures, but instead are supportive of expanding trade, employment and development.

Turning to the WTO's role as a negotiating forum, it is my Government's view that any negotiation undertaken in the WTO must follow the procedures established in the relevant Agreements to make them genuinely multilateral.

We agree that the WTO will take on issues relevant to the multilateral trading system. Such issues should be subject to a process of in-depth analysis to ensure that all Members are fully conversant with the issues and their implications.

We further believe that negotiations scheduled to begin in the next two years should cover only those areas identified in the built-in agenda or agreed by Members at a Ministerial Conference and should be underpinned by the principles of progressive liberalization and special and differential treatment for developing countries.

A point which cannot be stressed too often with regard to new issues, is the ability of small developing countries to cope with the WTO's present and future work programme, which will involve negotiations. The inability of national administrations to adequately prepare for negotiations could adversely affect the level of their participation.

As we have stated in this and other fora, Jamaica fully recognizes the need to keep pace with changing times, and the rapid evolution of new ideas. The multilateral trading environment does embrace the principles of non-discrimination and reciprocity. We also recognize that to gain and maintain market access we have to strive to be more competitive. However, we ask Members of this Organization to recognize that meeting the objectives set out in the preamble of the GATT 50 years ago is predicated on the achievement of a sustainable level of growth by all countries.

We should endeavour, therefore, to build a cooperative process which duly recognizes our differing levels of development and growth. This positive and more realistic attitude will enable all of us, in the new millennium, to reap the benefits we are hoping will result from this multilateral trading system, and see the WTO gaining the reputation as an organization which serves the interest of all its Member States.
