

WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

WT/MIN(99)/ST/80
1 December 1999

(99-5287)

MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE
Third Session
Seattle, 30 November - 3 December 1999

Original: French

MAURITANIA

Statement by H.E. Mr. Ahamdy Ould Hamady Minister of Trade, Handicrafts and Tourism

Allow me first to congratulate you on your election as the Chairperson of this important session and on the ability with which you have guided our work.

I should also like to thank the Government of the United States of America and the city of Seattle for their welcome and hospitality.

Our thanks go to Mr. Mike Moore and his colleagues in the Secretariat for the excellent organization of this Conference and also to our brother, Ambassador Mchumo of Tanzania, for the patience, tact and competence with which he has headed the General Council's preparatory meetings.

This Conference is important in more than one respect:

- It is being held five years after the establishment of the World Trade Organization, but more than 50 years after the creation of GATT;
- It is taking place on the eve of a new millennium;
- It seeks to launch a new round of multilateral negotiations.

In the past 50 years and more, the international economy has experienced rapid integration under the combined effect of greater trade, a massive increase in investment flows, and advances in disseminating information.

The creation of the WTO has in some respects crowned this evolution and is a symbol of the advent of a more global economic system.

The challenge now is to manage an increasingly globalized economy in an international context marked by an end to ideological divisions. However, this globalization has not yet removed the existing gap between developed countries and developing countries.

The immense wealth in the in developed countries stands in frightening contrast to the low living standards of the peoples of developing countries.

International trade has not always achieved the objectives have been set for it and which in a sense constitute its raison d'être – raising living standards and increasing production in those countries.

The causes of this state of affairs, but also the potential solutions, have been diagnosed so much that it would be idle to recall them here.

The fact is that the developing countries have not benefited as they had expected from the multilateral trading system.

This persistent situation accentuates the marginalization of many countries, undermines the confidence of the public in the multilateral system and fuels protectionist inclinations.

Our Organization should respond to the expectations of hundreds of millions of human beings by remedying this situation and by striking a balance between the right and obligations of developing countries.

These countries are still awaiting the implementation of the special provisions contained in the WTO Agreements that take account of their economic and trade conditions and, more particularly, those relating to the granting of special and differential treatment.

Moreover, this concept should be reviewed and refined so as to take account of developments in the multilateral trading system since Marrakesh. The situation of the least-developed countries calls for special attention, for they are experiencing the most acute difficulties.

The Integrated Framework for Trade-Related Technical Assistance approved in 1997 is still suffering from the inadequacy of the resources allocated to implement it.

The objectives of the Integrated Framework – market access, human and institutional capacity-building, improved trade infrastructure, etc. – have lost nothing of their urgency. For this reason, my country has just launched the preparatory process for a Round Table to implement the recommendations of the High-Level Meetings.

Despite an inauspicious international economic environment, my Government has for its part implemented wide-ranging political, economic and social reforms over the past 15 years.

With them it has been possible to establish the rule of law, to stabilize the economy, to liberalize the main sectors of activity, to markedly improve access to primary health care, to achieve a full-time education rate of more than 90 per cent, to launch a wide-ranging campaign to promote skills for all, and to establish a Commission to promote human rights and combat poverty.

Our Conference, being held on the eve of a new millennium, must bring innovative, real and practical solutions to all these difficulties, more particularly by strengthening technical assistance programmes and mobilizing suitable resources.

In any event, globalization does not deserve its name as long as two-thirds of mankind continue to live in the current precarious conditions, and the launching of further multilateral trade negotiations will be pointless as long as earlier commitments remain a dead letter. Apart from the high priority that should be attached to implementing earlier commitments, the new negotiations should pay special attention to issues such as transfer of technology, appropriate safeguards for developing countries, export financing, commodity markets and equitable integration of the developing countries into the multilateral trading system. The goal of the future round of negotiations must be clearly spelt out: development. On the other hand, matters falling within the competence of other international organizations must be avoided.

The universality of the World Trade Organization must be further affirmed by facilitating accession by new Members. In this connection, my country welcomes the recent bilateral agreement between the United States of America and the People's Republic of China, which will facilitate the

membership of that country in our Organization. Indeed, accession by the People's Republic of China and other candidates for membership can only strengthen the credibility of the multilateral trading system, for more thorough-going WTO rules that should go hand in hand with expansion of the Organization.

This Conference affords the opportunity to reaffirm our attachment to the multilateral trading system but also to settle the urgent problems of development, poverty and inequality that are being faced by dozens of developing countries.

Nothing is more urgent than the moral obligation and economic imperative of halting spiralling impoverishment and continued marginalization in an economy that is now being globalized.

The greatest challenge facing mankind on the eve of this new millennium is unquestionably to make sure that all peoples benefit from the immense possibilities offered by scientific and technical progress and economic integration.

Economic disparities should not take over from ideological divides as further sources of world-wide division.

Increased trade flows, greater investment flows and technological advances now offer unprecedented opportunities.

It is our common duty to ensure that the consequent advantages are amply distributed and to lay the foundations for growth and prosperity for millions of human beings who feel that, so far, they have been kept outside of this extraordinary process of globalization.

This objective is within our grasp and the best time to achieve it is at this highly symbolic changeover from one millennium to another which, we hope, will herald a bright future. In doing so, we will have made a major contribution not only to the world's prosperity but also to the foundations of international peace and security.
