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BOTSWANA

Statement by the Honourable Daniel K. Kwelagobe Minister of Commerce and Industry

On behalf of the Government and the people of Botswana, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Government of the United States of America for hosting the 3rd WTO Ministerial Conference here in this beautiful city of Seattle. This Conference affords Member States an opportunity to review the work of the WTO, reflect on the status of the implementation of the various Agreements, and to collectively strive for further and more equitable liberalization of trade.

Botswana reaffirms her commitment to the multilateral trading system as an engine of growth and development. However, we note that the implementation of the Uruguay Round Agreements has been a highly technical and complex process, posing major challenges for developing countries. Botswana is among the countries that have found it extremely difficult to fully implement these Agreements due to lack of technical and human capacity.

It is our firm belief therefore that the most urgent task facing the WTO and its Members is to press for a more rigorous implementation of these Agreements, to balance the rights and obligations of its Members and to facilitate the integration of developing countries into the multilateral trading system through the provision of more focused and coherent technical assistance. We believe that the proposed round of multilateral trade negotiations should be based mainly on the need to implement the existing Agreements, promote free trade between developed and developing countries as well as among developing countries and in particular, extend bound duty free treatment of exports from least-developed countries.

We also believe that the special and differential treatment for our countries must be seen as a basic principle and be fully incorporated and operationalized in these Agreements. This principle should be reconfirmed to closely link it to the development policies and capacities of our countries to implement the Uruguay Round Agreements. The transitional periods associated with the implementation of the various Agreements should also be reviewed to reflect the economic realities of our countries.

With regard to the on-going renegotiations between the EU and ACP group of countries, we are of the view that the ACP countries still need to maintain preferential access into the EU market to facilitate their smooth integration into the multilateral trading system. It is in this regard that we urge WTO Member states to support the request for an extension of the waiver for the current EU-ACP trade agreement.

While we recognize the importance of adequate protection of intellectual property rights to attract foreign investment and transfer of technology, we are still in the process of developing our intellectual property rights legislation and creating internal capacities to implement this Agreement.

Botswana therefore, supports proposals for extension of the transitional period for compliance with this Agreement. Further, we support proposals for a "peace clause" to ensure that developing countries are not challenged for their non-compliance during the period of negotiations of the new round.

The current imbalances in the rights and obligations under the Agreement on Agriculture between developed and developing Members of the WTO is of serious concern to Botswana. We believe that the focus of the forthcoming negotiations on Agriculture should be to develop appropriate modalities to redress the imbalances faced by developing countries. A decision to allow for flexibility on domestic support for developing countries will serve us well in our endeavour to promote food security. And the small economies, land-locked and island countries require assurance that their special circumstances would be considered during the new round of multilateral trade negotiations.

A large proportion of the population in Botswana is dependent on the agricultural sector. The output from this sector, however, does not meet domestic demand. As a result, Botswana is a net-food importing developing country. Botswana, therefore, supports the implementation of the Marrakesh Decision on Net-Food Importing Developing Countries, especially the establishment of the revolving fund facility to assist Net-Food Importing Developing Countries. We believe the Decision on Net-Food Developing Countries has to be urgently implemented as a matter of priority.

With regard to the issues relating to environment and labour standards, Botswana believes that these are important issues which have to be addressed in promoting sustainable development. However, while we support improvement of environmental standards, we note that the existing Working Group on trade and environment, which we believe has to continue to study and analyse the relationship between the two issues. Indeed, on core labour standards, we note that the Singapore Ministerial Conference took a definitive decision to refer this matter to the appropriate organization, the International Labour Organization.

Finally, as we approach the next round of negotiations, it will also be critical that developing countries be assisted to participate effectively in the negotiations of the new round. This should be done through the provision of technical assistance.

We are convinced that the issues outlined have to be addressed more rigorously if we are to put the multilateral trading system on a more sustainable path in the new millenium. This is the major challenge facing the WTO Member States.
