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Statement by H.E. Mr Charles Goerens
Minister for Cooperation and Humanitarian Action

I should like to congratulate you, Mr Chairman, on your election and, through you, to thank the Government of Qatar and the people of Doha for the welcome they have extended to us.

When your country first came forward with its offer to host the Fourth Ministerial Conference of the WTO, we could never have imagined the emotional burden that would gradually affect the work of this Organization. You have honoured your commitment at a time when the events of 11 September have brought the international community face-to-face with the threat of terrorism. Doha therefore marks an effort to get things back to normal, an effort which the 142 Member States are making consciously, thereby underlining the importance they attach to the WTO.

Today we are welcoming China and Chinese Taipei as new Members of the WTO, and other countries will soon be joining them, thus reaffirming the vitality of the rules-based, multilateral trading system and its relevance for a growing number of men and women throughout the world.

Does this mean that we have an obligation to achieve results? The current economic situation and the threat of recession make the launch of a new round a guarantee against protectionist tendencies and further inequalities. We must make sure that the prospect of new market opportunities is kept within a clearly defined framework of rules. The liberalization of trade concerns many different and – it has to be said – unequal actors so if its impact is to be equitable, there must be a careful negotiating process and a mutually supportive approach to implementation.

The agenda we have in Doha is clearer than that of two years ago. This progress, however modest, is not the result of a sudden, last-minute change, but rather the culmination of a process of dialogue and consensus-building, led by people such as Stuart Harbinson, who have been trying to restore confidence in the capacity of the multilateral trading system to act in the interests of all those concerned.

If the draft before us today is relatively disappointing, it is because there is still room for improvement. At this stage, we need to display the leadership and commitment required of political leaders, and accept the constraints of the present exercise, which involves seeking an appropriate balance between liberalization and regulation, and we must accept the price of that balance, namely the need to make mutual concessions.

For my country which, as part of the European Union, belongs to a part of the world that has perhaps set its sights higher than others, the path from Seattle to Doha has raised a series of questions. In view of the extent of the protest movement and, regrettably, the violent excesses of its extremist elements, the pleasure in finally possessing an Organization "with teeth" – to use a slang term - has given way to reflection on the Organization's internal workings and on how we use it.

The European Union has not revised its negotiating position downwards, and our basic demands remain unchanged. Our aim is not to impose ready-made solutions but to explore new options together and to respond to the need for clarification.

If my country, together with the European Union, today reiterates its desire to see negotiations in the WTO deal with the relationship between trade and the environment, and the link between trade and social development, and if we still maintain that agriculture has a role to play in the public interest that goes beyond production alone, this does not mean that we are insensitive to the reactions that these issues may have caused in countries outside the European Union, but that we are responding to a sense of concern felt by public opinion in our countries.

In my view, those who accuse Europe of attempting to restrict international trade by putting forward social or environmental concerns seem to forget that European consumers, who served for years as an outlet for colonial trade, today refuse to face globalization in the same state of ignorance and compromised principles, and the same is true of investors.

The right to information must be taken into account in the development of trade. As current events show, uncertainty is a factor of insecurity and destabilization. It must be possible to apply the precautionary principle and reverse the burden of proof, for food security and consumer confidence depend on it.

For many of us, the reforms under way in the agricultural sector are essential, and they must be pursued through progressive liberalization, taking into account the non-trade-related aspects of agriculture, and in particular its multifunctional character.

The abolition of agricultural subsidies, which sometimes seems like a *sine qua non* in the free trade discourse, may perhaps appear to presage the eventual disappearance of small- and medium-sized farms in Europe and elsewhere, but such a radical measure will not necessarily have the desired impact on poverty reduction. We can continue reformulating the issues, but not for much longer.

The WTO has reached a point of no return: the difficulties experienced by developing countries in implementing the Marrakesh Agreements are an indication of the imbalances that can no longer be rectified by adjustment measures alone. While it is true that some more technical problems can be overcome rapidly, others, precisely because of their structural nature, have to be dealt with in a broader framework of comprehensive negotiations. Taking into account the specific problems of developing countries must be an ongoing concern so that this round is indeed a development round.

In the area of intellectual property, the public health emergencies that have arisen compel both poor and rich countries to interpret the TRIPS Agreement. Despite the divergent approaches to this issue, we have an obligation to achieve results. The necessary flexibility must be guaranteed so as to allow access to medicines, particularly for developing countries that do not have production facilities.

These issues must be dealt with in our agenda; they have both trade and other implications. Consequently, the solutions must be found through trade negotiations within a multilateral organization which, together with other international institutions, has a responsibility to ensure sustainable development.

The European Union is taking precisely this approach by proposing an agenda that is as comprehensive as possible.
