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NETHERLANDS

Statement by H.E. Mr Gerrit Ybema
Minister for Foreign Trade

The Netherlands is built on foreign trade, that is why we like the WTO. Also, the Netherlands has always championed a strong international legal order. To protect the weak against the strong and to provide justice for all. That is why we need the WTO.

We have come to the hospitable city of Doha with great enthusiasm and expectation.

We want the Fourth Ministerial Conference to launch a new round of negotiations,

In the aftermath of 11 September there is a clear need for positive action. New negotiations to further liberalize trade in goods and services will boost confidence. Confidence that may help us avoid a deep recession, which would hurt the poorest countries most of all.

We also want to improve and strengthen the WTO. For instance, we need balanced rules in new areas to reflect ever changing economic realities. We must also improve existing WTO disciplines on anti-dumping. This instrument is much too often abused for protectionist purposes. We know that from our own experience as a victim of such unjustified measures.

We also need to expand WTO membership to make the Organization truly universal. Therefore, I welcome the accession of China and of Chinese Taipei.

There are hesitations and reservations about a new round. In particular with developing countries. They feel they did not get a fair deal out of previous trade rounds, I think they have a point. Even though their share of world trade is increasing steadily, there is a clear need to improve the world trade system. We must ensure that it works to the benefit of all. So let us make things better!

First of all we need to increase market access for products of particular interest to developing countries. These are not just hollow words. We mean it! Already five years ago in Singapore the Netherlands advocated tariff-free and quota-free market access for the least-developed countries. Since then we have not stopped our efforts. We kept pushing until the European Union took the decision to liberalize "everything but arms". I now call on all other industrialized countries to follow the EU's example!

Secondly, we need to ensure that developing countries are able to really participate in the WTO's work. They must be provided with training and other forms of technical assistance. Again, we mean it! It is a disgrace that the WTO's regular budget does not provide adequate means for technical assistance and capacity-building. This is a core function of the WTO. A fair burden sharing among Members is also important to the Netherlands. But until Mike Moore's plea for an adequate budget is honoured, we will continue to provide voluntary support. Just as we have done ever since the Singapore Conference.

A particular case of assistance concerns legal support in WTO dispute settlement. This cannot be provided by the WTO itself, because it must remain neutral. But what good are international rules, if only the rich have the means to secure access to justice?

Again, we mean it! the Netherlands, together with Colombia, took the initiative to set up the Advisory Centre for WTO Law. Last month it became operational. It provides developing countries and countries in transition with affordable legal assistance and training. I call upon all WTO Members to join and support the Centre!

Thirdly, the WTO must recognize the different situations of its Members, Therefore, special and differential treatment for developing countries must be an integral part of the negotiations we hope to launch here at Doha. For the same reason we need a fair solution to the implementation problems raised by developing countries.

Fourth, trade policy cannot be pursued in isolation. We need to interpret WTO rules in such a way, that they do not create an obstacle to effective policy-making in other areas that are important to all of us. For example: the protection of the environment, poverty reduction or public health. The Declaration we pursue here in Doha concerning the relationship between the TRIPS Agreement and access to medicines is just one example of what is needed in this respect.

As to the social dimension of trade, I agree with Alec Erwin that this is a complex, but important issue and that we should not fear dialogue.

In the days to come, we will decide on success or failure, a decision with historic consequences. We cannot afford to fail.

We cannot afford a breakdown of the global economic dialogue.

We cannot afford a breakdown of the drive towards a truly multilateral trading system.

Above all, we cannot fail the many millions in developing countries who have not been able to really benefit from the growth of world trade.

Failure is not an option!
