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SAMOA

Statement by the Honourable Hans Joachim Keil
Minister of Trade

(Speaking as an Observer)

It is with great honour and respect that I address this very important meeting on behalf of the Government of Samoa.

Samoa, which is a least-developed country, became an Observer Member of the WTO since 1998 and is still in the process of accession.

Since 1 July 1999, Samoa has embarked on the tariff liberalization programme, which saw a maximum tariff of 60 per cent being reduced to a maximum of 20 per cent. Samoa's four tariff bands are 0, 5, 8 and 20 per cent.

With the substantial reduction in our tariff rates, government revenue from import duties has correspondingly been reduced. This reduction in government revenue from import duties has somewhat been offset by an increase in revenue from the Value-Added Goods and Services Tax (VAGST).

We have embarked on this tariff liberalization programme despite the relatively small size of Samoa's economy (with a population of only 170,000 people).

We are still dependent on a few crops for exports at the face of increasing imports and limited natural resources, which has led to serious trade imbalances on a yearly basis.

Samoa's problems have been compounded by a relatively large external debt, low domestic resource mobilization and increased unemployment.

Despite our inherent problems, Samoa is still committed to be party to the multilateral trading system because we cannot afford to be marginalized or isolated from processes, which shape international trade policies.

From Samoa's point of view, the accession process for WTO membership has become a more complex, cumbersome and expensive exercise.

This is particularly true for least-developed countries with very limited financial and human resources.

As an acceding least-developed country, Samoa has found that the ongoing bilateral negotiations have stretched our financial and negotiating capacity to the limit. This has been

exacerbated by the pressure exerted by some developed country Members of the WTO on Samoa to agree to some of their strenuous demands on market access on goods and services.

Much has been said in various fora pertaining to the facilitation of the accession of LDCs. In fact, in the last WTO Ministerial Meeting in Doha, Qatar, this same issue was addressed in the Doha Declaration. Unfortunately, the reality is that no LDC has acceded since 1994 (until today) and that is a manifestation of the difficulties LDCs face as far as the accession process is concerned.

Accordingly, I appeal to WTO Members to exercise restraint in putting excessive demands on least-developed countries which are in the process of accession.

At the juncture, I would like to congratulate Cambodia and Nepal on their accession to the WTO.

Samoa also congratulates the Government of Mexico and the city of Cancún in particular for hosting this important Ministerial Meeting.

In addition, I would like to congratulate the new Director-General, Dr Supachai on your appointment and also the WTO Secretariat for all the preparations and the administrative work for this meeting.
