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ZIMBABWE

Statement Circulated by the Hon. N.M. Shamuyarira,
Minister of Industry and Commerce

It is an honour for me to address the Second WTO Ministerial Conference on behalf of my Government and country.

I would also like to extend, on behalf of the Zimbabwean delegation, our appreciation to both the WTO Secretariat and the Swiss authorities for the excellent facilities and organization of this Conference.

We recognize that this Conference is rather unusual in three aspects; it is taking place well before the two-year threshold; it is scheduled for only two days, and it coincides with a commemorative session of the GATT/WTO system. It would be regrettable however if these circumstances are used as excuses for us not to discuss issues of fundamental importance to our countries. In fact we would deplore all attempts to turn this Conference into a mere ceremonial occasion as this ignores and trivializes the very substantive and serious preparatory work that our countries have done prior to this meeting. In Zimbabwe's case this has included wide-ranging consultations within the SADC, ACP and OAU to consider the two main items on the agenda.

The question of implementing fully all the results of the Uruguay Round negotiations remains of primary importance, and is indeed the major priority and preoccupation of Zimbabwe. This is not only due to the complexity and the heavy burden of these agreements. We are particularly concerned that we still have to see the benefits that were expected to materialize following our acceptance of the WTO package. It is for this purpose that we continue to call for the speedy implementation of the special provisions in the WTO Agreements that are intended to promote trade and economic interests of developing countries as a means of tackling the threat of the increasing marginalization of our countries within the multilateral trading system.

We again emphasize the need for targeted and appropriate technical assistance to address Africa's difficulties in understanding and applying the provisions of the WTO Agreements. Such assistance should include advisory services, capacity building and training programmes to deal with supply-side constraints, lack of skills and resources to handle notification requirements and the enactment of the necessary trade legislation and frameworks.

Africa attaches, understandably, great importance to the implementation and follow-up of the decisions of the Singapore Ministerial Conference regarding the least-developed countries. These countries belong to a special, but deplorable category of the weakest group of developing countries. It is hence incumbent on all of us to take special measures to deal with their difficult situation.

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As a minimum, Africa calls on the WTO to fully implement the Integrated Programme for the Least-Developed Countries adopted by the High Level Meeting held in October 1997. In particular, the provisions of the programme relating to market access, capacity building, technical assistance and integration into the global trading system.

In Singapore, we also agreed to add yet more issues onto the work programme of the WTO by including trade and investment, trade and competition policy; transparency in government procurement; and trade facilitation. My country, as indeed many others, reluctantly accepted this additional workload. We are committed to faithfully carry out this programme within the spirit and letter in which it was agreed. However, we will not accept any changes to the agreed terms of reference and time-frames, nor any disguised attempts to introduce extraneous matters that were rejected at Singapore.

We have also given considerable thought to the question of the future work of this Organization, especially the preparatory process leading the next Ministerial Conference. Our position is that the WTO has on its current agenda, a lot of outstanding but pressing issues from which attention should not be diverted. We still have a number of so-called "unfinished business", "built-in agenda" and matters from the Singapore Ministerial Conference. Our countries are finding it difficult and onerous to cope with this heavy workload. It is therefore inconceivable and unacceptable to propose the introduction of more "new" issues. On the contrary we should double our efforts and energies to ensure that the implementation of the WTO Agreements achieves a balance of interests and benefits to all, including during the forthcoming reviews of the Agreements on Agriculture, TRIMs, TRIPS and Services. In all such reviews and ensuing negotiations, the development dimension should be made an integral element of the process.

Our Conference is juxtaposed to the GATT/WTO 50th Anniversary Commemoration. Africa considers that there is not much to celebrate. As stated in their founding provisions, the paramount objective underlying the establishment of GATT and its successor, WTO, was to raise living standards worldwide. After 50 years of existence, the GATT/WTO system cannot claim to have achieved this objective for many of the developing and especially African countries. In addition, the onset of the globalization and liberalization processes have not realized the expected potential of integrating these countries into the global economy, nor fundamentally changed the growth and distribution patterns discriminating against the weak economies.

In fact, despite high global growth rates in economic indicators witnessed in GATT/WTO's history, Africa has continued to experience an ever-shrinking share of international trade, financial and investment flows. This is notwithstanding far-reaching economic reforms undertaken both autonomously and under IMF and World Bank programmes. Income gaps between our poor peoples in the developing world and the rich in the North are ever-widening. And many of our countries continue to face acute balance-of-payments constraints and debt burdens, with the reductions in ODA flows serving only to exasperate the situation.

For many decades, the GATT has had a legacy of treating developing countries like second class members of a rich men's exclusive club. As a result, the GATT-based multilateral trading system could not address, and in many ways, contributed to the difficulties faced by developing countries. The World Trade Organization should commit, and dedicate itself to devising an integrated approach and multilateral process that will effectively address the marginalization of developing countries and the dangers that this state of affairs poses for the well-being of the multilateral trading system.
