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HAITI

Statement Circulated by H.E. Mr. Fresnel Germain,
Minister of Trade and Industry

Haiti is proud to have been one of the first signatories to the GATT, whose 50th Anniversary we are celebrating. We are equally pleased to be a full-fledged Member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) which is currently holding its second Ministerial Conference since its creation following the conclusion of the Uruguay Round.

In the new regulatory framework of world trade, special attention has been paid to the Least-Developed Countries (LDCs) in whose favour a plan of action was approved at the First Ministerial Conference held in Singapore in December 1996.

The greatest handicap of the LDCs is their low capacity to produce and market their goods and services in foreign markets, which marginalizes them from the process of globalization and trade liberalization.

The poor exportable supply of the LDCs is explained by weaknesses in their institutional framework and infrastructure (notably roads and energy), and a lack of skilled labour.

The High-Level Meeting organized in October 1997 to assess the needs of LDCs with respect to trade development raised hopes of seeing the above-mentioned constraints lifted, if only partially, particularly since institutions as prestigious and responsible as the WTO, UNDP, the IMF, the World Bank, UNCTAD and the ITC have committed themselves to pooling their resources in order to define an integrated framework of assistance for these countries in their effort to raise their level sufficiently to avoid marginalization.

Haiti is satisfied with the steps that are being taken by all the institutions concerned as well as by a number of WTO Member countries to ensure that there is a follow-up to this meeting, and we undertake to play our part in giving concrete form to the planned measures.

I take this opportunity to point out that Haiti is the only LDC in America and geographically one of the closest countries to the two most industrialized nations on the American continent. This is an embarrassing and almost intolerable situation for us.

I am sure that the situation is just as unpleasant for our immediate and far-off neighbours on the continent, and I am appealing to their spirit of solidarity to help us to benefit from their experience in institutional development and technical training, just to mention two areas in which a "big push" could have an extraordinary impact on the country's ability to attract foreign investment which, in its turn, would lead directly to the creation of exportable goods and services.