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DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

Statement by H.E. Mr. B.D. Mulumba Minister for Planning and Trade

1. The Democratic Republic of the Congo takes the opportunity presented by this meeting once again to congratulate Mr. Mike Moore, the new Director-General of the World Trade Organization and his deputies upon their appointment to lead our Organization and wishes them a productive term of office.
2. My country joins the other African countries in welcoming the initiatives already taken by the WTO in cooperation with other institutions (UNCTAD, IMF, World Bank, ITC, UNDP) to implement the Singapore Plan of Action for the Least-Developed Countries – which specifically includes capacity building and education programmes to enable them to deal with supply-related constraints.
3. My country also endorses all the resolutions adopted by developing countries in preparation for this meeting, in particular within the OAU, ACP and sub-regional organizations.
4. It is therefore worth recalling the declaration of the last Ministerial Conference that recognized the urgency of addressing the matter of the marginalization of the poorest countries, which was compounded by the chronic problem of the foreign debt burden.
5. Accordingly, the Democratic Republic of the Congo supports the initiatives designed to relieve or cancel the debt of the least-developed countries, as suggested by many Members, including France.
6. Nevertheless, a look at the overall status of the implementation of the multilateral trade agreements by WTO Members reveals that developing countries, and more particularly the least-developed, have not been fully satisfied to date, not only because some of their concerns have not been addressed, but also because of the paucity of technical assistance.
7. The Congo therefore underlines the need to increase targeted and appropriate technical assistance to correct this state of affairs expeditiously, by allocating the resources that are indispensable in implementing international rules and legal instruments.
8. In the light of these objective difficulties, we believe it would be unfair to initiate dispute settlement proceedings against developing countries which have been unable to implement the multilateral trade agreements, including the Agreement on Customs Valuation, within the specified time-frames.
9. As regards developmental problems, the major challenge facing the multilateral trading system is that of ensuring that these issues are dealt with globally and satisfactorily. Indeed, in most instances, the developing countries have accepted the recommendations of the WTO to the detriment of their public purse, which derives its income mainly from customs revenue. It would be only fair to

make sure that both existing and future trade rules help to compensate for the losses and imbalances suffered by the developing countries.

10. To that end, the international trading system should enable developing countries to reap maximum benefits from existing preferential treatments and opportunities of access to developed country markets by increasing investments, particularly in the agricultural sector.

11. Despite these constraints and in order to promote trade, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, regardless of the war of aggression being waged against it, has still made considerable efforts to align its customs tariff with the 1996 version of the Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System, and the tariff includes considerably reduced customs duties on both imports and exports.

12. Similarly, an extensive programme to implement clear, transparent, simplified and automatic customs procedures and regimes is now under way in a logical follow-up to the revised Kyoto Convention.

13. As to customs valuation, the Congolese Customs Department, which is still applying the Brussels Definition, is preparing to implement the WTO Agreement on Customs Valuation as soon as technical assistance is received. Contacts have already been made with the WTO in this regard and my country welcomes the prompt expression of readiness to help.

14. On the eve of the 21st century, the Democratic Republic of the Congo would like to see the World Trade Organization work not only to expand trade but also, and above all else, to improve the well-being of nations in a setting of greater social justice. Our country, its people and its Government warmly welcome the WTO initiative to institute a fair trading system. We endorse the ideal of globalization, on the understanding that this new system will allow countries such as ours to develop their mining, farming and environmental resources as well as to buttress their structural capabilities. We also believe that this new system will pave the way for access to new markets by our country.
