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CÔTE D'IVOIRE

Statement by H.E. Mr. Guy-Alain Emmanuel Gauze Minister for the Promotion of External Trade

The fact that the third Ministerial Conference of the WTO is being held in Seattle, a big and beautiful American industrial city, is of great significance. This meeting, which inaugurates the Millennium Round, underlines our common determination to win, embodied by the symbol of liberty represented by the United States of America.

This is why intentionally, when thanking you, Chairperson, I should like on behalf of the Ivorian Delegation to express my country's gratitude to our hosts, to the Director-General of the WTO, Mr. Mike Moore, and his team, whose efforts on behalf of greater integration of developing countries deserve respect.

The international trade regime that emerged from the Uruguay Round obliged Côte d'Ivoire to undertake far-reaching reform of its trade policy along the lines already laid down in the autonomous liberalization measures taken by the Government under the various structural adjustment programmes of the 1980s.

Bearing in mind the efforts it has already made, Côte d'Ivoire would like to share with you some of its concerns, which are those of developing countries as a whole, regarding the need to promote gradual and balanced integration in the multilateral trading system in order to take into account the varying levels of development of the WTO's Member States.

The third Ministerial Conference thus stands out as an opportunity to lay down the conditions for fairer distribution of the advantages gained through globalization of the economy. The aspirations of developing countries must also be taken into account by including practical measures in the various agreements that reflect the special nature of our economies, which are still fragile as a result of the debt burden and repeated external crises. In this connection, it is important to remedy the arbitrary utilisation of trade practices such as sanitary and phytosanitary measures, tariff peaks, anti-dumping measures and countervailing duties against products from developing countries because in practice these measures are real technical barriers to trade.

Côte d'Ivoire reaffirms and renews its commitment to be a credible and loyal partner of the other Member Countries of the WTO and continues to support the decisions taken at Marrakesh.

Nevertheless, we share the concerns expressed by developing countries regarding the agricultural reform programme that might be adopted at this meeting. This reform should not have a negative impact on least-developed and developing countries which are net food importers.

With regard to the crucial issue of the competitiveness of the economies of developing countries and supply constraints, in our view the solution is to be found in enhanced collaboration among the WTO, the IMF, the World Bank, other international financing institutions, and development partners so as to achieve effective coherence of economic policies.

For Côte d'Ivoire, African integration remains an essential element of its development strategy. It takes an active part in implementing sub-regional and regional economic policies, particularly within the framework of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

We are firmly determined to reinforce the integration process in order to promote the creation of a West African community as a factor for the harmonious integration of our countries in global trade. We are convinced that the establishment or strengthening of regional trade groups helps to strengthen trade and enhance the competitiveness of our integrated economies as a result of economies of scale by strengthening democratic principles and processes and opening up huge integrated markets to the outside.

We all agree that globalization represents an opportunity for our enterprises and economies to the extent that it encourages innovation and growth, but it is also a source of concern because, as you know, it leads to competition among countries with varying levels of development and imposes often painful adjustments. It is therefore a fragile achievement that sometimes leads to a protectionist reaction. The WTO therefore has a decisive role to play so that all our countries can derive mutual benefits from the process taking place by establishing the conditions for sustainable development and sustained growth for all.

Developing countries wish to have the time to adjust to the changes called for by the transformations taking place, both as regards the rules and the pressure caused by opening up markets. It is this vision of globalization with a human face that we would like to see the international community share with Côte d'Ivoire. In other words, there must be broad agreement on the social dimensions of globalization in order to combat poverty, promote employment, access to health care, education, rather than deregulation at all costs and intensified competition. It should be borne in mind that in the global economy the comparative, and therefore competitive, advantage will go to countries that have strong social cohesion based on investment in training, education and health.

I should like to lay special emphasis on matters related to trade and investment. The meagre flow of finance to developing countries, especially those in Africa, is worrying. Dynamic and appropriate action is essential to overcome the threat of increased marginalization facing African countries.

In view of the serious risk of seeing our countries marginalized, the maintenance of asymmetrical agreements for an adequate transitional period in order to sustain our efforts is essential for us.

This is the only way in which our countries could have their share of the increase in global income, estimated to be US\$500 billion between now and 2005.

Côte d'Ivoire supports the concept of an integrated approach to technical assistance developed by the WTO in recent years. This approach should be strengthened and improved in order to assist the practical development of national capacity in all developing countries without exception.

We are convinced that the integration of developing countries in the multilateral trading system remains a major challenge that has to be met and, in order to do so, application of the enabling clause and the provisions on differential and favourable treatment by the developed countries belonging to the WTO should help our countries to participate more effectively in the multilateral

trading system. We also consider that the WTO should play a major role in the liberalization of trade and in sustainable development through efforts to implement the Rio Declaration.

The challenges which we must face together affect three quarters of the Member countries of the WTO, whose populations live practically below the poverty level at a time when the unstoppable advance of the technological revolution, particularly in the telecommunications and information sectors, opens up vast possibilities in the world.

It is thus essential for the WTO to take sufficient account of the concept of trade that ensures sustainable, fair and balanced development within the process of global integration of all economies. This is one of the major challenges which we should all face together in order to respond to the expectations of the new millennium, so that the negotiating round which we will initiate becomes the development round.
