

# WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

WT/MIN(99)/ST/52  
1 December 1999

(99-5272)

MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE  
Third Session  
Seattle, 30 November - 3 December 1999

Original: English

## BAHRAIN

### Statement by H.E. Mr. Ali Saleh Al-Saleh Minister of Commerce

On behalf of the Government of Bahrain I would like to begin by thanking the Government and people of the United States, the State of Washington and the city of Seattle for their warm hospitality and efficient organization. I congratulate Ms. Barshefsky on her election as Chairperson to our Ministerial Meeting, and also the Vice Chairmen of this meeting. I also take this opportunity to congratulate Mr. Mike Moore on his appointment as Director-General of the WTO, and to wish him every success in the next three years and to thank the Chairman and Members of the General Council and Secretariat of the WTO for their diligent preparations for this Ministerial Conference.

This final WTO Ministerial Conference of the century faces many challenges; it is the hope of the State of Bahrain that the Conference will initiate a work-programme, which rises to these challenges, and I would like to briefly highlight some particular issues Bahrain would like to see addressed.

One very real threat to international economic development, and one which is of particular concern to small States such as my own country, is the danger of exclusion or economic marginalization. It is the duty of all Members to remain vigilant and to take positive steps to ensure that developing countries, and in particular the least developed among them, benefit from an equitable share in the growth in international trade and retain the discretion to liberalize their economies at a rate in line with their development needs.

Another challenge we face is that of consolidating the gains of the past. I believe that in tandem with efforts to build upon the Uruguay platform, it is essential that a comprehensive review is undertaken of **implementation** to date. As part of such review it is essential that developing countries are, where necessary, granted extensions to **transitional periods**, both to allow sufficient time for these countries to comply with the provisions of the Uruguay Round Agreements and to avoid a situation where a considerable number of WTO Members are, technically, in breach of the Agreements.

A more flexible approach to transition periods is one of the available methods of granting **special and preferential treatment** to developing Member States to encourage full implementation and participation.

Bahrain believes that the principle of special and preferential treatment is an important cornerstone of the global trading regime and would like to see its application reviewed and strengthened in the forthcoming negotiations. With regard to the proposed reforms in the trade in agricultural products, it is imperative that the Decision on Measures Concerning Possible Negative Effects of the Reform Programme on Least-Developed and **Net Food-importing Developing Countries** is fully implemented, in particular the clause relating to the provision of technical and financial assistance.

The TRIMs Agreement should be modified to provide developing countries another opportunity to notify existing TRIMs measures and to maintain these measures, as their development needs demand. It is the view of Bahrain that the Working Groups on Investment and Competition Policy established by the Singapore Ministerial Declarations should continue working under their present mandates and report to the next Ministerial Conference.

Concerning the labour standards, we believe that the International Labour Organization (ILO) is the correct venue for labour issues, as was agreed at the first Ministerial Meeting held in Singapore in 1996.

On the question of environment, the State of Bahrain considers that the Committee on Trade and Environment should give further consideration to these issues, and environment measures should not be used as obstacles to prevent the products of developing and least developed countries gaining free access to the markets of developed countries.

Given the substantial value of international commercial activity that involves **government procurement**, negotiations should be initiated to build upon the work of the Working Group on Transparency in Government Procurement. However, this Agreement should not prevent parties from applying their existing national policies and domestic procurement procedures.

From a practical perspective, the issue of **trade facilitation** remains of vital importance and we must continue to work towards the establishment of disciplines and guidelines for simplification and harmonization of international trade procedures. Throughout this process particular emphasis should be placed on the provision of technical assistance and capacity building for developing Members.

The next point I would like to raise relates to the astonishing speed at which developments are taking place in the field of **electronic commerce**. The work of the General Council on this subject must continue apace and should be guided by two important principles, first, that the current practice of not imposing customs duties on electronic transmissions should be maintained, and secondly, that technical assistance should be provided by developed Members to facilitate training and the development of electronic infrastructure in developing Member countries.

The final issue I would like to raise relates to the process of **accession**. Accession remains arduous, both in terms of its procedural requirements and its duration. Consideration should be given to streamlining the accession process, particularly for developing countries. In addition, countries seeking to accede to the WTO, again particularly developing countries, and least developed countries, should not be forced to make commitments over and above those required by the Uruguay Round Agreements. These issues are of particular relevance in our own region at present as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Sultanate of Oman and some other Arab countries negotiate the obstacles of accession. We fully support them, and urge other Member States to support them also and ease their accession.

Finally, I would like, on behalf of my Government, to endorse the launching of a new round of trade negotiations governed by the principles of transparency, inclusiveness, preferential treatment, and effective participation by all, including those countries in the process of acceding to the WTO.

It remains only for me to wish all of you the very best in the forthcoming negotiations, and to express the hope that together we may build on the achievements of the past, and work towards the development of an international trading system which guarantees equitable benefits for all peoples.

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