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GABON

Statement by H.E. Mr. Marcel Doupamby-Matoka Minister for Commerce and Industrial Development

On behalf of the Gabonese Republic, I wish to extend warm greetings to all those who have come from the four corners of the world to participate in this Third WTO Ministerial Conference.

I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Director-General on his election at the helm of our institution and to wish him success in carrying out his mission.

Like the other delegations that have spoken before me, please allow me to express our sincerest gratitude to the Government and people of the United States for their warm welcome and for all the facilities and comforts offered to our delegation since our arrival in the United States.

We consider that it is high time to realize the objectives we set ourselves and which are set out in several places including the second preambular paragraph of the Marrakesh Agreement Establishing the World Trade Organization, where all parties recognize the need "for positive efforts designed to ensure that developing countries, and especially the least-developed among them, secure a share in the growth in international trade commensurate with the needs of their economic development".

If we are to evaluate the situation, now is the time to assess the benefits reaped by each country through the multilateral system.

Undoubtedly, implementation of the WTO Agreements is of capital importance and must precede developing countries' full integration into the multilateral trading system.

This implementation includes recourse to the waivers written into the different Agreements. Therefore, technical assistance for this purpose must be strengthened.

It must be understood that the fact of being considered a middle-income country does not absolve us in any way from the burdens of human and structural underdevelopment which still plague the countries of the subregion and, in particular, Gabon.

The end of the Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations gave rise to enthusiasm and hope in our countries. Thanks to the new system based on equitable rules that excluded arbitrariness the new multilateral system was expected to strengthen economic and trade exchanges so as to generate strong growth and thus provide an appropriate response to the problems of economic and social development.

Five years after Marrakesh, despite the reforms and adjustments in many African countries including Gabon, we cannot confidently state that multilateral trade has changed Africa's prospects.

Africa is still not sharing in the benefits of multilateral trade. We must therefore identify the underlying causes of this paradox of a continent with enormous economic potential yet whose populations are considered to be among the poorest in the world.

1 January 2000 is exactly 29 days away. As you know, the implementation of the WTO Agreements implies mobilizing adequate resources to transform theory into practical realities. Technical expertise is fundamental. Although Gabon is considered to be a middle income country, we would like to see the WTO placing greater emphasis on a strategy that would give priority to the training and management of human resources so that we are not continually marginalized.

The latest UNCTAD Trade and Development report (1999) reveals that trade in developing countries has been constantly falling since the 1980s by about 1.5 per cent per annum.

The WTO should allow for the effective opening up of developed country markets to Africa so that we can find a lasting solution to our problems of employment and growth.

I am certain that the concern of all of us here is to integrate fully into the world economy those economies which have remained on the sidelines for a long time. In order to do this, we must redress the decline in official development assistance. The crux of the chronic problem of the debt burden is the lack of coherence between the Bretton Woods institutions and other development institutions.

In an economic system that is ever more prone to crises, there is a strong need for synergy among the WTO, the IMF and the World Bank. This coherence would allow the social implications of debt and its repercussions on the stability of our States to be taken into account on an ongoing basis.
