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## ALGERIA

### Statement by H.E. Mr. Ahmed Attaf Minister of Foreign Affairs

*(Speaking as an Observer)*

It is a great privilege for the Algerian delegation to take part in the work of this Third Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization. That sense of privilege is combined with our heightened interest, considering the scale and importance of the matters at stake in this meeting.

Coming as it does on the eve of a new millennium, this Third Ministerial Conference is momentous from several viewpoints. First, it is clearly a propitious moment, five years after the inception of the WTO, for an evaluation of the methods and conditions of implementation of the Agreements that crowned the Uruguay Round of negotiations.

Next, it is an occasion on which to recall just how much the multilateral treatment of trade issues pursuant to the spirit and letter of the Uruguay Round Agreements represents a significant step forward for humanity as a whole. As a developing country, we have welcomed this advance, not only because it helps to institute a rule-based system in the place of the power-based system that had prevailed hitherto, but also because it seems to us that the strengthening of economic and trade relations is the best avenue towards a more interdependent, mutually supportive and hence more peaceful world.

Lastly, it is an occasion to underscore the high degree of interdependence that must exist between trade and development. In this connection, my country which, as current President of the Organization of African Unity – and, moreover, has just hosted the meeting of African Ministers of Trade in Algiers – believes that the appropriate and satisfactory treatment of development issues is one of the major challenges facing the multilateral trading system today. Indeed, it would seem that this rule-based system is as much in need of strengthening as its advantages need to be more equitably distributed in the future.

The countries of our continent, which have had to undertake sweeping reforms of their economic structures in recent years, are expecting this Seattle Ministerial Conference to support those reforms and contribute to the implementation of measures that will facilitate, foster and help those reforms to succeed.

To this end, steps must be taken to ensure proper recognition of special and differential treatment for developing countries at the international level, by comprehensively dealing with trade issues on the one hand and issues relating to official development assistance, investment flows and foreign debt on the other.

Real, unquestionable progress has been made since the inception of the WTO. Yet that progress is today still fragile and needs to be strengthened by including the legitimate interests of a good many countries that are still finding it difficult, despite their endeavours, to benefit from the

multilateral trading system. These objective difficulties are being encountered specifically with regard to:

- Adapting domestic laws and regulations in the framework of transition periods;
- Dealing with issues of market access for products from least-developed countries;
- Effectively implementing the Marrakesh Ministerial Decision on the Possible Negative Effects of the Reform Programmes on Least-Developed Countries and Net Food-Importing countries;
- More appropriately addressing the needs of developing countries in reviewing the TRIPS Agreement in regard to the transfer of technology and the obligatory granting of licences for the manufacture of essential medicines;
- Facilitating regional integration agreements between developed and developing countries, by a less restrictive interpretation of GATT Article XXIV.

Despite many problems, it cannot be denied that, within a short space of time, the WTO has become an economic organization to be reckoned with in international life.

The scale and importance it has now assumed makes it imperative for the WTO to remain alive to the expectations of the large number of candidates for membership. In this connection, it must be pointed out that our enthusiasm as newly acceding countries does not elicit an encouraging and ideal response from Members and at times is even dampened by extremely restrictive procedures. Because we are genuinely convinced of the advantages of multilateralism, we believe that remedial steps should be taken in this regard, as such a move would be of interest not only to candidates for membership but also to all Members, in that what is at stake is the expansion of the sphere of influence of the multilateral trading system and the strengthening of the universal nature of the WTO.

For its part, Algeria has already been involved in preparing and conducting serious negotiations for membership in the WTO for some years now. Thus, the first meeting of its Working Group took place in 1998 and enabled it to acquire a relatively complete overview of the level of conformity of its foreign trade regime with the provisions of the various multilateral trade agreements currently being managed by the WTO.

That first meeting, which yielded several benefits, also gave us a better grasp of our future obligations within the Organization. We will continue to be just as determined in the ongoing negotiations to align our laws and regulations with the WTO rules.

Furthermore, we are now preparing the initial offers that we expect to make to our various trading partners in regards to customs tariffs and trade in services. We are convinced that presentation of these offers in the coming months will do much to speed up the process of Algeria's entry into the WTO.

You may rest assured of Algeria's determination to join the ranks of this Organization and hence of our desire to reap the benefits of the multilateral trading system. We are convinced that for economies like that of Algeria, the rules governing the system are the best guarantee of harmonious integration into world trade, and one that will work to the benefit of our economic and social development and also help to expand and consolidate the multilateral trading system.

I should like to close by wishing the present WTO meeting every success and I thank you for your kind attention.

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