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Statement by the Honourable Pehin Dato Abdul Rahman Taib Minister of Industry and Primary Resources

I would like at the outset to thank you, the US Government and the people of Seattle for hosting this important Conference. I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate Mr. Mike Moore on his appointment as the new Director-General.

Our meeting here in Seattle is being held at a critical juncture. It is the last Ministerial Conference before we step into the new millennium. More importantly, it is being held when the world is struggling to keep pace with the rapid changes brought about by globalization.

The events on the streets testify to this. In our view, they also serve to remind us of the objectives embodied in the Preambles of the Marrakesh Agreement. The pursuit of higher standards of living, full employment and benefits to developing and least-developed countries has become even more urgent. Our discussions therefore accord us the opportunity to address such concerns and collectively chart the road map of the global trading system in a balanced manner.

At this juncture, I wish to recall a very important mandate from the Second Ministerial Conference in Geneva. The mandate was to evaluate the implementation of the Uruguay Round Agreements and the realization of their objectives.

We have now had almost five years to implement the Uruguay Round Agreements. The evaluation conducted of their implementation clearly indicates that there are real difficulties. Frankly speaking, benefits are largely confined to developed countries, with their edge in technology, know-how and infrastructure. For many others, the promise of economic growth and development remains largely unfulfilled.

We need therefore to strengthen the special and differential treatment provisions contained in the Agreements. Meanwhile, technical assistance to developing and least-developed countries should be stepped up. The mandated reviews of these Agreements should also effectively address issues of concern and interest to developing and least-developed countries. This, I strongly believe, is the key to enable developing countries to share the benefits of the Uruguay Round Agreements.

The preparations for this Ministerial Conference, which began a year ago, have incorporated the many concerns of Members on the need to further improve and strengthen the world trading system. More than 150 proposals were submitted to the General Council for consideration. Our officials have been working hard in Geneva over the last few months to decide which issues should be included for negotiations and which should be categorized for future work programmes.

Therefore, apart from the mandated new negotiations in agriculture and services, the other issues proposed for inclusion in new negotiations must be closely examined in order to avoid overloading our work programme in the coming years. In addition, my delegation would also support negotiations on non-agricultural tariffs, if products of interest to developing countries are included.

Many other proposals are however, not yet ripe for negotiations. We thus believe that exploratory work on the Singapore issues of trade and investment, trade and competition, transparency in government procurement, and trade facilitation should continue.

It would also be appropriate to extend the application of the Declaration on Global Electronic Commerce until the Fourth Ministerial Conference and establish a horizontal non-negotiating group. As this technology is at the embryonic stage in most developing countries, we believe that studies of trade-related issues arising from electronic commerce should also consider how best to enable these countries to benefit.

Brunei Darussalam, like many other WTO Members, subscribes to core labour standards. Nonetheless, we feel compelled to reiterate our Singapore agreement that the International Labour Organisation is the competent body to deal with such issues.

In conclusion, we would like to stress that new negotiations and the future work programme should take into account fully the needs of developing countries. These new negotiations should aim at providing greater benefits to all Members, in particular, timely and effective market access for developing and least-developed countries. This, to our mind, is the only feasible and credible way of ensuring that the world trading system does not further marginalize some Members. We must move forward with vigour and renewed commitment to reinforce our collective undertaking to strengthen the multilateral trading system.
