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SAMOA

Statement by the Honourable Hans Joachim Keil Minister of Trade, Commerce and Industry

(Speaking as an Observer)

It is with great honour and respect on behalf of the Government of Samoa to address this very important meeting.

Samoa which is a least-developed island country is an Observer Member of the WTO and is currently in the process of accession.

The relatively small Samoan economy has a number of structural weaknesses, which affect its economic growth prospects.

Its dependence on a very few crops for exports and limited natural resources results in a serious trade imbalance.

It also has a relatively large external debt, low domestic resource mobilization, a growing labour force and increasing urban unemployment.

The Samoan economy relies heavily on development assistance and private transfers to balance the external account and to narrow the resource gap.

Most of our Government's revenue has been derived from import duties and income taxes.

However, our commitment to tariff liberalization has seen most of our tariffs being reduced substantially from a maximum of 60 per cent to a maximum of 20 per cent.

This became effective from 1 July 1999.

Tariff liberalization and trade facilitation measures in the multilateral trading system will continue to be pursued by our Government.

Samoa is located in that part of the Pacific Ocean which is prone to natural disasters, particularly cyclones, which in recent years had caused severe damage to domestic infrastructure and output, especially in the agricultural sector.

To that effect, Samoa together with other small island economies request the WTO Members to kindly consider our economic and environmental vulnerabilities when assessing our economic status.

Although a comparatively small player in international trade, Samoa is nevertheless affected by events and changes taking place in the world economy.

Hence, Samoa cannot afford to be marginalized or isolated in processes that shape the international economy particularly that of international trade .

The Government of Samoa is of the view that it has much to learn from larger countries and to gain from global trade.

The accession process for countries to become Members of the WTO has been viewed, at least from the LDCs point of view, as a cumbersome and expensive exercise.

As Samoa is currently in the process of accession, we appeal to you the distinguished Members of the WTO, to allow us least-developed countries to accede to the WTO on terms that our meagre resources can afford.

At this juncture, Samoa supports the accession of Vanuatu, Tonga and other LDCs to become Members of the WTO as I believe they have spent a lot of time and resources in trying to fulfil and meet the various demands requested of them, by the existing Members.

Our commitment to full trade liberalization and facilitation will be further enhanced once we are involved in this multilateral trading system.

Samoa is prepared to fully participate in the proposed rounds of negotiations and will try as much as possible to contribute to this important process.

Samoa congratulates the city of Seattle and the Government of the United States of America for hosting this important meeting.

Thank you also to the Director-General and the WTO Secretariat for the preparations and the administrative work for this meeting.
