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MC10 OPENING SESSION
15 DECEMBER 2015

This Tenth Session of the Ministerial Conference is particularly significant. It coincides with the commemoration of the WTO's 20th anniversary and it is the first WTO Ministerial Conference to be held in Africa.

The Government of Kenya agreed to host MC10 on behalf of the whole African continent to demonstrate Africa's strong commitment to multilateralism, the rule of law, the multilateral trading system and Africa's desire to participate more effectively in it.

It is a personal privilege for me to chair this Conference and a great source of pride for Kenya to be your host.

Africa holds significant potential, including for investment, growth and development. Yet, many of our economies still face severe supply-side, institutional and structural constraints that hinder our ability to harness this potential. Africa can and must overcome these challenges to fully optimize its potential. An open, rules-based, non-discriminatory, multilateral trading system, as embodied in the WTO, can respond to these challenges and support Africa's efforts towards fostering economic growth and development.

The multilateral trading system also provides the insurance policy that all our economies need to engage in global trade under conditions of stability, predictability and transparency. A strong WTO that places development at the heart of its work can foster economic growth and development for all of us.

Kenya for one knows first-hand the immense value of increased participation in international trade to its economy. Kenya's Vision 2030 recognizes the important role that trade plays in the mobilization of resources for economic development. My country has recognized that multilateralism represents a strategic component in our efforts to maximise the opportunities offered by global trade. Kenya is therefore strongly committed to strengthening the WTO and retaining its role as guarantor of stability and predictability in trade.

The increasing number of countries that have acceded to the WTO over the past 20 years – as well as those still seeking WTO accession – bear testament to the fact that WTO membership is as an important tool for economic growth and economic stability.

I am delighted that this Ministerial Conference will consider the accession of two LDCs – the Republic of Liberia and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. We look forward to welcoming both nations into our WTO family.

As an African, I look forward to gavelling the formal adoption of the accession of Liberia, which has reached this important milestone under the strong political leadership of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. The accession of yet another African country sends a clear signal that there is a dynamic

and rapidly growing Africa, which is ready to contribute further to strengthening the multilateral trading system. I am confident that this accession will be a springboard for Liberia's increased growth and development.

As we mark the 20th anniversary of our Organization, it is important that we recognize the Organization's achievements and the contribution it has made to the wealth and stability of our economies – without forgetting the obstacles that we have overcome along the way, the challenges we continue to face and those that lie ahead. And looking ahead, the experiences of the past need to be retained as lessons for the future.

Over the past two decades, the regular work of the WTO has largely contributed to the transparency and predictability of international trade relations, dispute settlement and avoidance, and better understanding of the rules.

The negotiating work of our Organization has also brought real benefits to many of our economies. In 2001, for example, we all agreed to a landmark Decision on TRIPS and Public Health to address the needs and challenges of developing countries, particularly in Africa, with regard to malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. Concrete steps have been taken both with regard to access to medicines and ratification of the Amendment to the TRIPS Agreement. But more can be done on both fronts. As MC10 Chair, I urge your Governments to make further advancements on this vital issue.

The decisions we also took in Bali in the areas of trade facilitation, agriculture and development are further testament to the ability of the System to deliver concrete negotiated outcomes. In particular, the Decision on Public Stockholding for Food Security Purpose was important in recognising the difficulties that developing countries face in ensuring adequate food supply for their people.

The adoption of the Trade Facilitation Agreement was also important. Trade facilitation is, after all, the oil that moves the wheels of trade. It is therefore important that the Agreement adopted in Bali enters into force as soon as possible. Kenya on its part has already taken steps in this direction by ratifying the Agreement and depositing its instrument of acceptance to Director-General Azevêdo last week. Let me take this opportunity to urge for more ratifications of this Agreement in order to further enhance competitiveness of all our economies and market access opportunities, especially for our small and medium-sized enterprises.

While we celebrate our achievements, we should not forget that the System faces serious challenges. These include a slow and uneven recovery from the severe economic and financial crisis of 2008, lower global economic growth, increased unemployment, raising inequalities, significantly slower expansion of international trade and climate change. This is also coupled by the increasing security threats and incidents, which could lead to the closure of borders and resultant, unintended retreat from liberalization efforts.

History teaches us that it is in precisely these times of uncertainty and economic difficulties that we all need to collectively ensure that the multilateral trading system remains resilient. Now more than ever, it is important that we, the Ministers Responsible for International Trade, voice our strong collective commitment to open trade, multilateralism and a WTO that delivers meaningful results.

Over the past weeks and months, we have done a lot of work. Geneva has been working intensively to put together a set of deliverables that would build on the success we achieved in Bali and ensure further progress at the multilateral level. I salute these efforts and am grateful for the leadership that the Director-General and the Chairman of the General Council have tirelessly given to this process.

What is on the table are a number of texts, including a draft Ministerial Declaration, to be discussed and agreed upon during the next few days. As Chair of the Ministerial Conference, I can assure you my full commitment to the success of this Conference and I will offer my full support. I will spare no effort.

As the highest decision-making Body of the Organization, we must provide the necessary guidance, so that the WTO can continue to tackle the issues of concern to all our peoples and remains relevant as the main forum for global trade governance and trade negotiations.

To achieve this, we will need to work together over the next few days, with unity of purpose and resolve, towards our common interest of safeguarding the WTO in all its functions – particularly its negotiating function, which is currently facing a few challenges.

This Conference provides another opportunity to build on the results we have achieved in our negotiating work, including recently in Bali. We must, yet again, demonstrate to Africa and to the whole world that the WTO can deliver results and make steady, incremental progress that pushes the multilateral trade agenda forward for everyone.

Let us seize this opportunity and collectively ensure that this first WTO Ministerial Conference in Africa builds on the strong foundations we laid all together 20 years ago. We must ensure that the System continues to respond to the aspirations of all Members. Let Africa, with its vibrancy, dynamism and growth potential, be the springboard to provide renewed impetus to the WTO. Karibuni sana!
