

**STATEMENT BY HEAD OF SRI LANKA DELEGATION**  
**At the 11<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference – Buenos Aires, Argentina**

Madam Chairperson,  
Director General / WTO,  
Excellencies, Distinguished delegates,

I deliver this speech on behalf on Hon. Rishad Bathiudeen, Minister of Industry & Commerce of Sri Lanka who was unable to present here to attend this august meeting due to unavoidable urgent circumstances.

I am privileged to be here at this 11<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference as it is a historic moment of having the first WTO Ministerial in this region. I convey my sincere thanks and appreciation to the government of Argentina, in particular, Hon. Susana Malcorra, the Chairperson of the august gathering and her team for the great hospitality they have been extending to us since our arrival.

The global trading environment continues to evolve posing formidable challenges as well as opportunities. Slow growth in trade, challenges from the digital transformation, attracting FDI, level of unemployment, access to trade financing and sustainable development are some of the great challenges that many of us encountered today. The role of rules based multilateral trading system led by WTO has therefore become more crucial in paving a level playing field for its members in particular for small economies such as Sri Lanka in supporting their integration into the world trading system.

Director General of WTO once stated that trade has proven to be one of the best anti-poverty, pro-growth and pro-development tools in history. The question is how we maintain such positive role of trade and derived the desired benefits in this challenging multilateral trading environment.

We as members from developing countries while making every effort to align our policies with our multilateral commitments, expect WTO to play a role of the facilitator of our development goals. Such win-win situation is the key success factor for achieving Sustainable Development Goals ensuring our meaningful and sustainable integration into the world trading system.

In this regard, I wish to emphasize role of WTO as enabler of making necessary technical and capacity development assistance for Small Economies such as Sri Lanka particularly in the areas of Aid for Trade, Transfer of Technology, Trade Facilitation, Trade Finance and Development. Such assistance has proven positive gains facilitating way for better integration in to the world trade.

With regard to my country, we adopted Trade liberalization policies since 1977 which complemented in establishing multilateral rule-based trading environment. Sri Lanka considers international trade as the engine of its economic growth. The country's geographical location, conducive business environment complemented with a knowledge-based society have offered competitive strengths to the country and its trading partners. The growth strategies are therefore, aimed at participatory approach to sustainable development creating opportunities for international trade.

Sri Lanka places its highest importance to the WTO-led multilateral trading system and the Doha Development Agenda as the way for the country's sustainable integration in to the global trade. Sri Lanka therefore, looks forward to pragmatic address of remaining issues of the DDA, with adequate and meaningful policy space to facilitate the country's full integration in to the global trade.

WTO members' positions continue to diverge significantly on the substantive issues, despite best efforts and the fact that there is no agreed negotiated outcomes in Geneva. It shows how intransigent and difficult the process had been. Based on the current situation, Sri Lanka believes that it would be reasonable to expect outcomes on agriculture, development, and rules which are also in the DDA and our expectation that we will be able to issue renewed mandates for continuation of many developmental issues, where the progress is lacking as they are important to Small and Vulnerable Economies such as Sri Lanka.

In concluding, I wish to take this opportunity to convey the appreciations of the government of Sri Lanka to Mr. Roberto Azevêdo, Director General of the WTO for all his hard work and excellent leadership.

Once again stressing on Sri Lanka's belief that the World Trade Organization remains the premier negotiating forum to improve multilateral trade rules, I wish successful conclusion of this Ministerial.

THANK YOU.