

**STATEMENT BY ACTING DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN
AFFAIRS, INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND EXTERNAL TRADE, MRS
ROLINE TEKON
WORLD TRADE ORGANISATION
11TH MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE
12 DECEMBER 2017
BUENOS ARIES, ARGENTINA**

Madam Chair, Director General Robert Azevedo, Ministers, Excellencies, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is with much pleasure that Vanuatu is able to make this statement at a Ministerial Conference since we became a member six years ago.

Like all countries, Vanuatu depends significantly on international trade in goods and services for its economic development and to improve the standard of living of its people. As a small country and after suffering from haphazard trade disciplines, we joined the WTO for the rules-based multilateral trading system that we saw as being able to be responsive to the aspirations of small and vulnerable economies and least-developed countries by continuing to provide a robust platform which would enable them to expand and diversify their economies and use trade as an engine of economic growth and sustainable development. The rules-based multilateral trading system is a force for good that would help all of us to use trade to alleviate poverty and attain economic development.

Last night at the Heads of Delegation briefing, I listened with much trepidation as it was, and is, evident today that arriving at a Ministerial outcome is a hard ask. That is the bad news. The good news is that as a family of trading nations, most of us, including Vanuatu, support calls to ensure that MC11 is a success and we must all exercise flexibility in the various issues to ensure there is a Ministerial outcome. We call on all countries to support our hopes and aspirations which must not be undermined by the continued inflexibility in the positions of the key trading nations.

The 11th WTO Ministerial Conference here in Buenos Aires holds a special significance for Pacific WTO Members. We face unique challenges including small nations surrounded by enormous seas, geographical isolation and vast distances from major markets, environmental challenges from climate change and rising sea levels and the smallness of our economies. The sea and ocean that surrounds Vanuatu and the Pacific Islands teem with fisheries resources that we consume and trade. But like our countries which face the negative effect of climate change, our fisheries resources are also at risk with illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, bigger countries who overfish in our waters and larger countries who come into our seas and ocean with fishing vessels large capacity that pose unsustainable harvest of our fishes.

Vanuatu calls upon all WTO Members to intensify their efforts to reach agreement on the Fisheries disciplines in Buenos Aires - which is crucial for our small and vulnerable economies of the Pacific.

We also expect that at this meeting, to support with other WTO Members an agreement on a post Buenos Aires Work Programme which will give high

priority to issues of utmost importance to SVEs and LDCs across all the negotiating areas.

We urge the developed country Members to support a Work Programme that addresses the particular structural disadvantages and inherent vulnerabilities of SVEs and LDCs in a holistic manner. The commitments that would emerge from the negotiations will be crucial in determining whether or not we should continue to place our confidence in the multilateral trading system.

We reaffirm the importance of Aid for Trade, and more particularly, the Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF), for developing and strengthening the productive capacity and economic infrastructure of LDCs. We call on our development partners to positively support the extension of the trade development programme post 2017.

We must send a powerful signal from this Conference that the WTO is very much alive by adopting a Buenos Aires agreement. We, WTO members must continue to see the bigger picture and not focus on our own small and narrow interests. The multilateral trading system has contributed greatly to the expansion of the global economy and it is our duty to do whatever is necessary at this meeting to adopt a future package and fulfil the aspirations of SVEs and LDCs.

We thank the President and the people of Argentina for their warm hospitality and excellent organisation and facilitation of this Conference. We recognise Madame Chair and the Director General of the WTO and would also

like to thank them both for their substantive and transparent approach in the negotiations thus far and hope that this process will continue and we look forward to working with all WTO Members arrive at constructive outcomes that will promote and strengthen this multilateral trading system in the coming years.