CLOSING SESSION - 7 DECEMBER 2013

STATEMENT BY DR ROB DAVIES, MINISTER OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY ON THE PASSING OF MR NELSON MANDELA, THE FIRST DEMOCRATICALLY-ELECTED PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

We would like to thank you and the Director-General for the opportunity to deliver this statement.

We greatly appreciate the expressions of condolences we have received you, Mr Chairman on behalf of the entire WTO Membership, as well as from many individual Members since the news of the tragic passing of Nelson Mandela, our first democratically-elected President of the Republic of South Africa, and a global icon.

These sentiments echo the many tributes from people, organisations and leaders from across the world and reflect the enormously high global esteem in which Mr Mandela was held.

The South African Delegation is far from home at this tragic moment in our country's history.

We met as a delegation yesterday morning, and as is our custom in South Africa on the passing of a loved one, we shared our experiences of interacting with "Madiba" as he was affectionately known. While most of our Delegation had only occasional interactions with him, it was evident that those interactions deeply influenced each of us personally.

We marvelled at the way in which Madiba always expressed sincere interest and concern in the personal lives of everyone he met. He interacted with each of us with great humility, despite the stature he held on the global stage.

More than that, Nelson Mandela dedicated his life to the struggle for freedom, democracy and justice, not only for the majority of South Africans oppressed by an unjust Apartheid regime, but also for the poor and oppressed across the world.

Madiba was nothing if not an internationalist as exemplified by the fact that, as Members of the leadership of our host country have noted, he adopted the Indonesian batik shirt as his chosen wear in both formal and less formal occasions.

As we sit here at the close of the Ninth WTO Ministerial, it is appropriate that we recall the speech delivered by President Mandela to the 50th Anniversary Celebrations of the GATT in May 1998.

On that occasion, President Mandela reminded the audience that although South Africa had become a founding member of the GATT at a time when "the vast majority of South Africans had no vote", South Africa remained committed to "vastly improve on the management of the world trading system to the mutual benefit of all nations and people".

In his own words, Mr Mandela said: "In the end we must remember that no amount of rules or their enforcement will defeat those who struggle with justice on their side" and added that "where there are manifest inequalities then special and thoughtful measures have to be applied".

In many ways, in that speech, Mr Mandela prefigured the sentiments that underpinned the Doha mandate, which was launched three years later with an explicit commitment to place the needs and interests of developing countries at the heart of its work programme.

Mr Mandela's statement to the WTO expressed the need for a strengthened multilateral trading system that was fair, balanced and inclusive, and that addressed the needs of the developing countries.

These timeless principles remain as valid and relevant for the WTO today as they were when Nelson Mandela articulated those views in 1998.

In its modest way, the South African Delegation has attempted to use these principles as the guide in our conduct in the WTO and pledge to continue to work with the Membership of the WTO to prioritise this development mandate, including the implementation of agreements of importance to developing countries reached at this conference in Bali.

As the world mourns this great statesman, the greatest tribute we can pay to his life and work is to build on his legacy and continue the noble struggle for freedom, democracy and justice.

Hamba Kahle Great Statesman, Comrade Nelson Mandela.

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