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BURUNDI

Statement by H.E. Mr Charles Karikurubu
Minister for Trade and Industry

First of all, I should like to express, on behalf of H.E. Mr Domitien Ndayizeye, President of the Republic of Burundi, the Government of Burundi, the delegation I represent and in my own name, our sincere gratitude for the welcome and attention we have received since arriving in this lovely town of Cancún.

Let me also extend my warm congratulations to Mr Luis Ernesto Derbez on his election as chairperson of the Fifth Session of the WTO Ministerial Conference.

Burundi is a least-developed country and, like all the members of that group, we have made foreign trade the key element of our development strategy. Since 1986, we have been liberalizing our economy. Allow me to draw attention to some of the significant reforms already implemented in order to demonstrate our clear determination to contribute fully to the process of establishing the open, non-discriminatory multilateral trading system we all seek to achieve through this Organization. From 1986 until now, Burundi has, *inter alia*:

- Reduced tariff bands and set a ceiling of 40 per cent for import duties;
- lowered import duties with a view to reaching a zero tariff in 2004 for products from within COMESA, the regional organization to which Burundi belongs;
- abolished import bans and quotas;
- liberalized the foreign exchange market and legalized accounts in foreign currency; and
- abolished price controls.

Burundi hopes to continue to consolidate its trade liberalization policy in accordance with the various WTO Agreements. In that context, we submitted our trade policy review document in April 2003, which was accepted by the WTO bodies and fellow Members of this Organization.

Like other least-developed countries, Burundi attaches great importance to enhancing market access for its products. Therefore, we are strongly in favour of unrestricted, tariff and non-tariff barrier-free access to developed country markets for all products from least-developed countries.

Regrettably, there are clear indications that the least-developed countries' share of world trade continues to shrink, and they will have to pool their efforts to reverse that trend. Enhanced market access is the only way to avoid their even greater marginalization from world trade.

Despite the huge restructuring programmes carried out in many developing countries in general, and in the least-developed countries, Africa, in which 70 per cent of least-developed countries are situated, is still marginalized from international trade. By ratifying the Marrakesh Agreements, these countries affirmed their faith in the multilateral trading system as a factor of growth and stability.

However, nine years after the World Trade Organization was founded, we regret to say that our achievements have been far fewer than expected.

The developing countries in general, and least-developed countries in particular, have borne the heavy burden of implementing the WTO Agreements, which has meant increased imports and the emergence of a number of barriers to our exports, such as tariff peaks, tariff escalation, technical standards, etc. ...

Implementation of the WTO agreements still presents our countries with numerous problems. These must be reviewed, and we must try to limit distortions and imbalances. The following are just some of the issues we consider to be most pressing and crucial, which best reflect our current priorities and which may enable least-developed countries to increase their exports:

- Genuine, duty- and quota-free access to all developed country markets for all products from least-developed countries;
- rules of origin applicable to products from least-developed countries should be carefully revised to take into account their industrial capacity;
- interpretation and implementation of existing provisions of the WTO Agreements should respond to the needs of least-developed countries;
- elimination of export credits and subsidies for developed country products which compete unfairly on our own markets with our industrial and/or agricultural products;
- granting of special and differential treatment to our countries in the agricultural sector in order to meet our food security needs.

With regard to intellectual property rights, we welcome the recent developments concerning TRIPS and Public Health, and call for the effective implementation of provisions with a view to facilitating access to essential medicines at lower cost for our populations.

With regard to technical cooperation and capacity-building, Burundi welcomes the Integrated Framework, designed to establish a coherent model for building trade capacities, in conjunction with the poverty reduction strategies of least-developed countries. We emphasize the need to enhance WTO technical assistance, through a substantial increase in its budgetary allocation, which should mainly be allocated to strengthening production capacities for exportable products in order to improve our trade balance and create jobs, with the ultimate aim of reducing poverty by redistributing income in rural areas.

The Doha Ministerial Declaration established the Integrated Framework for Trade-Related Technical Assistance to the Least-Developed Countries as a viable model for the development of trade of least-developed countries. Burundi, where a Diagnostic Trade Integration Study (DTIS) has now been completed, requests the use of Window II of the Integrated Framework Trust Fund, in order to complete implementation of a project of crucial importance for the success of the Integrated Framework, which I have called the "Essential Oils Project".
