
MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE

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BELIZE

Statement by the Honourable Eamon Courtenay

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1. I thank you, Mr Chairman, and the Government of Mexico for hosting this Fifth Ministerial Conference and for the excellent arrangements and hospitality. As your neighbour, it gives me special pleasure to be here. It is a measure of our closeness, both geographically and fraternally, that I came to Cancún by road.

2. I turn directly to this Fifth Ministerial that brings us here. The developing world starts this Conference with a clearer understanding than ever before of the disastrous consequences for our people if the industrialized countries were to get their way at Cancún. Not surprisingly, therefore, we begin as well with unprecedented unity among developing countries in resistance of such a result: solidarity articulated with clarity and technical quality as never before.

3. What follows are two propositions:

1. In terms of process, that the solidarity of the poor is the touchstone of success at Cancún; and
2. in terms of substance, that for the world as a community no deal is better than a bad deal at Cancún.

4. As to "unity", there will be attempts - they have already begun - to split us apart. We have to resist all blandishments and threats - carrots and sticks - alike, and insist on respect for our fundamental interests. If we are together, we cannot be overborne.

5. When we are asked to compromise for the sake of "success at Cancún", we have to ask: "success" for whom? Consensus for its own sake is not "success". A bad deal at Cancún will be a catastrophe for billions of people the world over - and for generations to come.

6. Yet, there is no sign yet of a good deal at Cancún. We know that the basic "Ministerial text" from Geneva is damaging to the interests of the developing countries, particularly in the areas of "agriculture", "industrial tariffs" and the "Singapore issues". We know that it is grossly inadequate in the areas of "implementation issues" and "special and differential treatment". We know this in the Caribbean, in the ACP and in the G77; the African group knows this; the LDCs know this; Brazil, China, India and the rest of the Group of 21 know this. And so do many others.

7. In a Commentary on Cancún published at the start of this week, the Nobel Prizewinner Joseph Stiglitz made the point which has always been fundamental to developing countries, namely, that the Cancún Ministerial is essentially an opportunity for assessment - assessment of where we are

since Doha; of where we are being induced to go; of where we must not go. He is right, it is time for stocktaking.

8. For insisting on stocktaking and not going blindly forward on a "rich country" agenda and a "road map" drawn up mainly in Washington and Brussels, poor countries have been accused of being "spoilers". I for one am willing to spoil the party if it is one that cooks the future of Belize and the developing world.

9. But genuine success here is still attainable. We can succeed if our final text includes appropriate provisions for smaller economies; if we recommit ourselves to special and differential treatment for developing countries; we can succeed if the text provides for the retention of preferences for an appropriate period of time; and if we provide for technical assistance and capacity-building for developing countries. There is no consensus on launching negotiations on the Singapore issues – Belize is not ready to agree to such a launch. Above all, we must remain faithful to the Doha Development Agenda.

10. As delegates look out from their grand hotels on the peacock sea of the Caribbean I invite them to reflect on the fact that one legacy of European conflict and colonialism in and around these waters is economies that are all small and underdeveloped. Belize's population is around 250,000 - and we are five times the size of some Caribbean Island States. In that context, we see value in a global regime of rules and disciplines in trade. The rule of law is always more in the interest of the small and weak than the unbridled sway of power.

11. But that is not what the WTO has turned out to be for us. For any who question, let the sordid saga of bananas provide the answer. Power continues to hold sway. We know of what we speak.

12. And so do the ordinary people of the world who protest our proceedings. They serve a worthy cause. We have very properly marked the terrible fatalities in New York and Stockholm. Let it not be said that from this podium none marked with sorrow the tragic death of a Korean farmer in the streets of Cancún pleading the cause of the poor. My country does.

13. I must say in all candour, Mr Chairman, that for Belize a bad deal in Cancún could mortgage our development in generational term; it could condemn us to poverty in perpetuity; it could destroy our vibrant democracy; it could leave us a legacy of societal chaos. I don't need to tell you that Belize would not be a part of such a deal. Before that, it would be better that there be no deal at all - for now.

14. If that amounts to a minimalist result from this Meeting, it would be because justice and betterment for the world's poor have come before ambition and avarice of the world's rich. Asserting that alone would make Cancún a true success.
