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Statement by H.E. Dr Didier Operti Badan
Minister for Foreign Affairs

I should like to begin by paying special tribute, on behalf of my Government and the people of Uruguay, to the generous hospitality shown by the Government of Mexico in hosting the WTO Ministerial Conference here in Cancún.

We are sure that the work we are beginning today under your leadership, on a date that serves as a painful reminder of the dramatic events of only two years ago, will enable us to achieve the requisite results to fulfil the mandate we adopted in Doha in November 2001, at the launching of this round of negotiations.

In Doha, international public opinion looked forward to the potential results of our work, wondering whether the WTO Member States would finally be able to reach an agreement bringing greater credibility to the international trading system and opening new horizons for trade and development. Those horizons are real factors with the capacity to make an impact on international co-existence, and to improve the real situation of people and their affairs.

I believe that we are facing a similar challenge today, and I have no doubt that our countries will again live up to their joint responsibility to find new areas of common ground in pursuit of stranger, freer and fairer trade. Against a global backdrop characterized by political instability in some regions, economic slowdown and uncertainty, a successful meeting here in Cancún is no longer merely what we hope to achieve, but has become a common imperative, and can make a specific contribution to international peace and security.

This new round of negotiations has been described as the Development Round. Never has a truer word been spoken. At the beginning of a new century, the time was ripe for the international community to make a concerted, renewed and credible effort to respond to the needs of its least fortunate members.

What our countries need is not international charity, but more open markets for our exports, fairer rules and disciplines that protect our comparative advantages, and special and differential treatment that enables us to meet our development needs properly.

Over 50 years have gone by since many of our countries began this adventure to build a multilateral trading system to encompass us all. Over 50 years have gone by in which many countries whose welfare depends upon commodity exports have fought to obtain a fair price for them. Over 50 years have gone by in which agriculture has suffered from persistent discrimination and has been excluded from the rules of free trade, while they have been fixed and developed for other trade, finance and high-technology sectors.

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We believe that the time has come to ensure that agriculture is fully integrated into the free trade rules.

Could anyone doubt that an ambitious result in this area would be a decisive contribution to development, an essential incentive to greater integration of developing countries in the international system, and a key element in efforts to alleviate poverty?

Thus, it is time to go beyond the national interests and sectoral egotism that have hindered these reforms and, at long last, to abolish domestic support and export subsidies - which have such a distorting effect on international trade and unfairly penalize developing countries - and, at the same time, to open up new and improved market access opportunities, especially to the markets of the most developed members of this Organization.

This reform is no longer the wish or demand of a more or less broad group of countries. It has grown into an international outcry, impossible to ignore or to sidestep any longer.

But nor do our countries want to limit their development aspirations to commodities forever. We also want to reap the rewards of our work force, labour and intelligence. Therefore, these negotiations must afford us the opportunity to foster our own industrial sectors, encourage manufacturing and enhance our capacity to develop the services sector.

Consequently, it is important for the results in these areas to facilitate improved participation by our countries in the process of the globalization of production and not confine our role to that of mere witnesses, bearing the costs, and enjoying very few of the benefits.

Finally, I want to reiterate that it is essential for these negotiations to be successful and for them to respond adequately to our development needs. Otherwise, not only will the Doha process come to a standstill, but it will be rendered meaningless and suffer irrevocable damage, and we are certain no country wants to contribute to this.

All of us, both developed and developing countries, are faced with a shared objective and duty.

These negotiations are an opportunity and a challenge for all WTO Members. The opportunity to resist the temptation of protectionism, to consolidate agricultural policy reforms, to strengthen the principle of multilateralism and international cooperation once and for all and, in short, to secure better conditions for the sustainable development of our societies, in order to raise the quality of life of our people. That is also our major challenge. Uruguay sees this as an opportunity to formulate its vision of international trade as a tool for establishing new models of international fairness and justice.

I wish to end by assuring you that Uruguay stands ready to make every possible effort to achieve these objectives, and that you may count on the generous and unfailing support of my country in steering our work to a successful conclusion.
