

# WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

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**MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE**  
**Fifth Session**  
**Cancún, 10 - 14 September 2003**

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## SOUTH AFRICA

### Statement by the Honourable Alexander Erwin Minister of Trade and Industry

South Africa believes that the task we face here in Cancun is highly achievable - because all of us know the critical decisions we must take in this Conference, if the WTO is to remain true to its purpose of promoting global economic prosperity in which all can benefit, especially the poor and marginalized in the world.

There have already been too many missed opportunities, and history will judge us harshly if we are to allow Cancun to fail to put the world trade system on a course that will fulfill the hopes of millions of people in the developing world for a share in the fruits of the globalized world economy.

In 1994, the Uruguay Round produced an imbalanced outcome for developing countries. We tried to correct that in Singapore in 1996, and we made some progress. We failed dismally in Seattle in 1999. In Doha we gave ourselves another chance, and raised the hopes of the poor and marginalized by adopting a *Development Agenda*.

Here in Cancun we must prepare to harvest, and we have scored a historic victory with the agreement on Trips and Public Health concluded in Geneva just days before Cancun. South Africa believes that, unless we act with a greater degree of common purpose and a sense of urgency, the cause of development will once again be set back, with negative implications for the developing world, and indeed for the global economy.

Because of the many missed opportunities, our agenda has become crowded by too many issues. Many of them are driven by powerful interests in the rich countries seeking to preserve their unfair privileges.

But we dare not be confused that the central and overriding task we face in this negotiation is to decisively address the fundamental structural imbalances in the current world trading system. For South Africa and the developing countries, this is a fight about social and economic justice, and it is a fight inside the WTO, and not outside in the streets, as has fashionably become depicted by the media.

It is therefore inevitable that agriculture, and the outcome in this area, is decisive in whether we succeed or fail in Cancun. It is through addressing the inequities in the current global agricultural trade regime that we can begin to seriously address the widespread poverty in which so many millions of our people live in the developing world, and in Africa in particular.

Beyond the preferences that have enabled us to begin to trade, what the poor need is to be able to trade on a fair and level playing field, and in a meaningful and sustainable manner. True,

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<sup>1</sup> This document cancels and replaces the document with the same symbol circulated on 11 September 2003.

preferences have been an important starting point; but to be told to remain content with a system of selective preferential treatment for a handful of commodities is to be denied the opportunity to realize the full potential and comparative advantage of our economies, many of which are richly endowed with natural and human resources.

With the success we achieved in Doha, we have it is truly within our means to make a decisive break, and fulfill the promise of development through multilateral cooperation under the WTO.

The moment is right. And with the growing alliance of developing countries around the G21, the alignment of political power is also right. The G21 represents the vision and the leadership that the world and our people have long hoped for in the face of the challenge of addressing the imbalances and inequities of the current agricultural trade system, and in ensuring global economic prosperity in which all can benefit, in the developing and developed worlds alike.

The approach of the G21 is not a South versus North approach, but represents real advance in addressing the development challenge and achieving justice in agricultural trade and the world economy, in which both the North's and South's people have an interest.

Our task in Cancun should, and can, be approached as a matter of common purpose and collective interest of the world. But the opponents of fair trade and real progress are opting for divide and rule tactics against developing countries - dividing us on the basis of those included and excluded in preferences, on the basis of those more developed and less developed, and on the basis of the continents from which we come - all this to distract us from the central task of attacking an unfair and iniquitous trade system, and to delay the necessary and urgent changes that we must agree to in this conference.

They will succeed if, as developing countries, we fail to recognize that our power in this negotiation lies in uniting behind the common goal of a freer and fair global trade system, which will advance our economic development, and which is within our grasp.

We dare not let this happen, and we dare not let Cancun be yet another missed opportunity.

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