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PANAMA

Statement by H.E. Mr. Joaquín E. Jácome Diez
Minister of Commerce and Industry

I have the honour to address you on behalf of the Government and the people of Panama and to thank our sister country, Mexico, for extending the hospitality of its people to a Conference which, I am certain, will create the momentum needed to continue implementing the Mandate arising from the Doha Development Agenda.

I should like to reaffirm the solidarity of the people of Panama with the United States and with the other countries affected by the attacks that took place on a day like today. The strength demonstrated by that nation in reacting to the tragic events has been a model of tenacity for the rest of the world.

Two years ago at the Doha Ministerial Conference, Panama voiced its concern over the difficult times facing us at the global level, which were a test of our capacity to continue to move ahead in the face of such challenges. Today, however, we are optimistic because the situation will enable all of our countries to reduce poverty levels and thus improve the quality of life of our peoples.

Our country needs to increase export volumes. Therefore, we are working to develop the production capacity of Panamanian enterprises, supporting them through a balanced and transparent system whereby we can generate economies of scale and compete in a fair trading system.

The Government of the Republic of Panama firmly believes that this Ministerial Conference will succeed in reaching a consensus that reflects a balance of the interests of all Member States in areas such as agriculture, non-agricultural products, services, Singapore Issues and development issues.

It is worth underlining the achievement made by developing countries in securing a decision on Intellectual Property and Public Health. This Agreement ensures that, in certain situations such as epidemics and health emergencies, developing countries will be able to obtain medicines at lower cost by importing generic products from factories that will not require a licence to market them.

With regard to agriculture, the primary sector is a fundamental pillar of Panama's economic structure, sustaining thousands of families living in the countryside with the hope of a better future. Accordingly, our Government regards food security and rural development issues as the key to addressing the existing imbalance between developing and developed countries.

We support the efforts countries have been making to achieve a balanced and progressive reduction, with a view to the elimination of subsidies, as well as the domestic support reductions made by developed countries.

With a view to helping to resolve the agricultural problems faced by developing countries, Panama has promoted the inclusion of the issue of special products, as our proposal to this Ministerial Conference demonstrates.

We also need to establish a new special safeguard mechanism to make sure that domestic markets are not affected by trade-distorting imports, with the proviso that the special safeguard mechanism should be established only for developing countries.

With regard to non-agricultural products, Panama is seeking greater openness to trade. Average tariff levels in our country are among the lowest in the region. We believe that various formulas should be examined with the aim of eliminating non-tariff barriers and providing effective market access. We urge Members that have yet to bind a high proportion of tariffs to continue the work to achieve concrete results during this Round of negotiations.

As to services, Panama has led the way by complying fully with the established timeframe for submitting applications and making initial offers. We have participated tirelessly in the efforts of these negotiations to continue to open up this sector, which is of vital importance to our country. We encourage other Members to play a more active part in this process, so as to expand trade in services in a climate of transparency and progressive liberalization.

Following the work on the Singapore Issues, Panama supports the initiation of negotiations on trade facilitation and transparency in government procurement, since they are tied in with international trade and the way it functions. Our country is fully prepared to support other Singapore Issues, and thus stands ready to continue working to find the best way forward in addressing competition policy and investment.

We hope that, throughout the discussions taking place over the five days of this Conference, the principle of special and differential treatment can remain at the forefront of our agenda, so that it will be fully reflected in the Ministerial Declaration.

We take this opportunity to thank everyone who has helped to bring about this Conference, and to pay special tribute to the work of the Chairman of the Conference, H.E. Mr Luis Ernesto Derbez.

Once again, we call upon all Member States to carry on working together to achieve a balanced declaration, in which all of our interests are reflected, so that we, the Trade Ministers at this Conference, can return to our countries with an encouraging message for our peoples.
