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MAURITIUS

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on behalf of the African Union

I have the privilege to address this august gathering on behalf of the 53 Member States of the African Union and in my capacity as the current Chairperson of the Conference of the Ministers of Trade of the African Union.

In this global trade and economic forum, Africa, more than any other continent, must prompt reflections on what it is all about.

Our 34 Least-Developed Countries and some 18 developing countries comprise a large mass of the world's poor. Nearly one half of our continent's population lives on \$1 a day and one third is under-nourished. African countries south of the Sahara share of global trade has declined from nearly four per cent in the 1960s to less than two per cent today. And competent observers, including a renowned Nobel Laureate, have estimated that we in Africa have actually been made worse off as a result of the Uruguay Round.

But Africa would not like to be seen merely as the weakest link in the global economic and political chain. It would rather regard itself in a positive sense as a test case for the benefits of liberalized trade and globalization, while playing its full part in the WTO processes leading to them. The success of the WTO in its turn would be measured by the extent to which the Organization could fulfill these hopes and aspirations of Africa and indeed of all developing countries. If the WTO has a conscience, its still small voice would be heard from Africa.

In November 2001, at the Fourth WTO Ministerial Conference held in Doha, Qatar, Ministers undertook a collective commitment to place the needs and interests of developing countries at the heart of the WTO work programme. One year and ten months into the Development Round, the hope and optimism generated in Doha has been replaced by a palpable sense of disquiet over the meagre results achieved so far.

While we welcome the recent Agreement on TRIPS and Public Health, we remain nonetheless concerned that it should have taken so long to reach an agreement on such a fundamentally humanitarian issue. It is a delay that Africa paid for through the loss of numerous human lives. But, on the other hand, with the Agreement now concluded, we feel hopeful that hundreds of thousands of other lives could henceforth be saved. Let me remind the participants that more than 22 million AIDS infections have been recorded in Sub-Saharan Africa, larger than any other region of the globe. In certain countries an estimated 40 per cent of the sexually active population is infected.

I wish to draw particular attention to the Mauritius Declaration adopted by the AU Ministers of Trade and endorsed by the Heads of State and Government of the African Union at their recent Summit in Maputo. This document, which has been formally submitted to this Conference through the WTO Secretariat, reflects the common positions of the AU Member States on the critical issues in the Doha Development Round and their unified call for a fair and just global trading system. It is our expectation that this Conference will take careful account of the proposals contained in that Declaration, since they articulate the views and perceptions of a large number of developing countries on the main issues of the Doha Development Round.

The call from Africa for a fair and just global trading system has been construed in some quarters to be indicative of a growing radicalization of the African position on international trade issues. Nothing could be further from the truth. The truth is that poverty is on the increase on our continent and there is growing concern that the Millennium Development Goals will not be realized in Africa. We acknowledge the role of internal factors in many cases, like conflicts, inappropriate policies, deficiencies in democracy and governance etc. have contributed to the dismal situation we face in Africa, but the fact remains that effective poverty reduction in much of the Continent needs a more supportive international environment which should include, among other things, a review and re-casting of the international commodity trade. As for internal problems, our programmes of policy reforms, the establishment of the African Union and the adoption of NEPAD are aimed at addressing them.

We believe that there is an urgent need to create an enabling environment in the African countries for trade. African exports need to be globally competitive. In this regard, attention needs to be given to developing the infrastructure for trade, including physical infrastructure, energy and finance in order to make our countries more competitive. And here we need assistance and support from the leading developed countries.

It cannot be denied that the imbalances in the global trading system have contributed in no small measure to Africa's crisis of poverty and underdevelopment. Permit me to illustrate this with just two examples. Agriculture, as we are all aware, is the mainstay of the African economy, offering significant potential for the generation of employment and income, foreign exchange earnings and poverty eradication. The negative impact of distortions in world agricultural markets on the economies of African countries is illustrated by the current experience of West and Central African cotton-producing nations. A trading regime that fails to address such a persistent and painful decline in terms of trade of developing countries could not be said to be fair or equitable.

On Non-Agricultural Market Access, the proposals for steeper and deeper tariff cuts by developing countries hardly take account of the needs or capabilities of many African countries for economic diversification and industrial development. The erosion of trade preferences which will result from tariff liberalization will certainly have negative implications for industrial development and diversification on the African continent.

Globalization and the multilateral trading system have an undoubted capacity to deliver prosperity to mankind. However, this will be sustainable only if the benefits are equitably distributed between the rich and the poor, the strong and the weak. For the poor and weak countries to participate effectively in the WTO process and partake of the benefits their level of development would need to be adequately raised and the imbalances and constraints in the implementation of existing WTO accords effectively redressed. This is the rationale of the work program on special and differential treatment and implementation-related issues which we endorsed in Doha. The true test of the success of the Cancun Conference and of our commitment to the achievement of a just and fair global trade regime will be the extent to which special and differential treatment, implementation-related and other issues of interest and concern to developing countries are addressed.

In concluding, let me quote from Mrs Frene Ginwala, the speaker, of the South African Parliament who, in her conclusion in the recent Global Coalition for Africa meeting in Nairobi said, and I quote: "As we are aware, trade is crucial in economic growth and an area of growing importance in international relations. It is ironic that from a *laissez-faire* approach, we have moved into a rule-based regime to regulate international trade. But in this, as in other areas of globalization, the system has been managed to favour the rich and the rules benefit the developed countries. Hence the developing countries and Africa in particular are marginalized. It is in the long-term interests of both developed and developing countries that there is a more equitable and balanced regime."

Let me say for my part, speaking for all Africa, that the Doha Development Agenda must not remain one largely in the untested phrases of the Doha Ministerial Declaration. Let it be so in reality, in its actual implementation and its positive effects on global development through liberalized and expanded trade. Ensuring that it will be so is the challenge before this conference as it reviews the course of the Doha Development Round at this crucial stage.
