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REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

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This Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization gives me an opportunity to share with the other Members of our Organization the concerns of the Government of the Republic of the Congo regarding developments in the trade negotiations conducted since the Doha Conference.

First of all, I should like to express our gratitude to His Excellency the President of Mexico and our thanks to the Government and people of this beautiful country for the hospitality and the very warm welcome extended to our delegation since its arrival here.

I should also like to pay special tribute to the Director-General of the WTO and all his collaborators for their manifold actions in support of developing countries.

We must also welcome the agreement recently reached on generic medicines. We sincerely hope that its entry into force and implementation will be less laborious than the negotiations.

The Republic of the Congo is a Central African State that has enormous economic potential. Nevertheless, the Congolese people, weakened by the ordeals suffered when gaining its sovereignty, have not derived any benefit from the advantages so generously afforded to it by nature.

All the efforts made by the Government since the Congo became independent have been in vain as a result of internal social conflict and the hostile nature of the international economic situation.

As a result, far from improving, the situation has never ceased to deteriorate over the years.

Today, the majority of the Congolese are still living in extreme poverty. This dramatic situation has not however dampened their ardour and they remain determined to meet the challenges of developing their economy and improving their well-being.

Under the guidance of the President, His Excellency Denis Sassou Nguesso, the Congo is undertaking internal reforms in all sectors of the national economy so as to create a more favourable environment for investment.

At the external level, the Congo is playing an active role in boosting sub-regional and regional integration at the African level.

In addition, cooperation with various bilateral and multilateral partners is being revived and strengthened.

All these efforts will not be able to realize their full potential unless they receive the indispensable support of the international community.

This is the moment to call on the Members of the WTO to make sure that their work at this Conference is constantly underpinned by the need to support the development efforts of all countries, particularly those in difficulty, in order to meet together the challenge posed by the objectives of the Development Millennium.

The Doha Ministerial Conference had the merit of dissipating the concerns raised in the minds of developing countries by the failure of the Seattle Conference.

The reciprocal commitments made by developed and developing countries raised great hopes, especially as regards agricultural issues, public health, technical assistance, capacity-building, special and differential treatment, etc.

Now it is time to take stock and the main factor that emerges is failure to respect the timetable and the intransigence of some Members, which show that the commitments made at Doha were probably not sincere. At the least, it can be stated that the determination to transform them into concrete acts is decidedly lacking.

The Seattle syndrome would take over once again if it were not for the efforts recently made by the negotiators that led to some developments in the spheres of medicines and agriculture.

The slow pace of implementation of the Doha programme, however, places us before a dilemma because not only would some of us like to move faster towards the opening up of new areas such as the Singapore Issues, but others are still trying to adapt to the provisions of the Uruguay Round Agreements.

We all agree that trade liberalization should continue and even speed up; but is it possible to move ahead together in a negotiating process that appears to be unbalanced? Is it even possible to envisage reaching a consensus when each side is clinging to its position and taking refuge in its own interests, exercising pressures of all sorts to ensure that these carry the day?

The heavy task facing this Conference is to provide an objective assessment of implementation halfway through the Doha Round, to draw the lessons from the frequently contradictory positions defended by States or groups of States, and to define the new negotiating strategy that will lead us together to a real understanding that takes into account the concerns on each side and is necessarily based on reciprocal compromises.

The task is a difficult one because the interests of Members are very different. But do we have a choice? All the elements contributing to the deadlock must be examined and means of eliminating them proposed so that the progress desired for so long and expected by our people will be rapid and they can quickly move out of the infernal cycle of poverty and unemployment, marginalization and underdevelopment.

This means that, in achieving the objectives of the Doha programme, each of us must, above all, demonstrate solidarity so as to allow small economies to benefit from support measures that could help them rapidly to reach a certain level of development and thus respond to the needs of their people.

This is the price to be paid for restoring confidence within our Organization and in future prospects. It is the only way to ensure that present and future negotiations go ahead smoothly.

Some of the issues of concern to developing countries in general, and the Congo in particular, are: technical assistance, capacity-building and special and differential treatment, whose redefinition

will have a real and immediate impact on the export capacity of the States concerned, the competitiveness of their production sectors and their economic performance.

This is why the Republic of the Congo firmly supports the initiative by certain African countries concerning cotton subsidies so that the survival needs of around ten million farmers are taken into account.

We hope that this meeting in Cancún will consider this issue seriously in order to give the developing countries concerned a response that is equal to the importance of the interests at stake.

With regard to genetically-modified organisms, our country is a large importer of food products amounting to some US\$150 million a year and would be in favour of supporting their dissemination throughout the world. Beforehand, however, we would like to understand better their impact on the environment and on the future development of our agriculture, but also, and above all, better assess the impact consumption of these products has on health and human life.

The proliferation of regional trade agreements, apparent in all regions of the world, is a factor to be taken into account in discussions in the WTO.

In particular, bearing in mind the benefits they are supposed to give the countries concerned, greater flexibility should be introduced into some provisions of the GATT 1994 so as to maintain consistency between regional trade agreements and WTO rules.

Despite the modest results achieved in implementing the Doha programme, the Republic of the Congo remains attached to the idea that a well-organized and well-balanced multilateral trading system can contribute to the shared development of nations and the well-being of the people on our earth.

The poverty that is still the daily lot of people in Africa and elsewhere, as well as the passing socio-economic tensions often noted in developed countries, *inter alia*, are indicative of the limits of our political choices, environmental constraints, and also the lack of cohesion among the members of our community.

This is why we reaffirm our endorsement of the Doha Declaration and call for a systematic analysis of the issues raised therein in order to adopt new strategies to resolve them.

The harmonious and balanced development of all Member States of the WTO must remain the essential objective of this Conference. In our view, it should therefore led to the creation of a true global partnership in favour of development, on the basis of a clearly expressed common determination that is resolutely implemented.

The Republic of the Congo joins the African Group and the ACP countries in supporting all initiatives liable to promote sustainable development for all countries in general, but particularly those with small economies.

I wish our work every success.
