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GHANA

Statement by H.E. Dr. John Abu, Minister of Trade and Industry

Almost five years have elapsed since the coming into force of the Uruguay Round Agreements. As we brace ourselves for the new negotiations, it is only logical that, as a first step, we undertake an evaluation of the implementation of the Agreements, as we wisely decided to do in paragraph 8 of the Geneva Ministerial Declaration. Such an evaluation would enable us to learn from our experiences and chart a course that would ensure that the multilateral trading system operates for the benefit of all Member countries, both big and small.

Ghana, like many African countries, has over a decade been steadfastly pursuing structural reforms with the objective of achieving economic recovery and sustainable growth. Though appreciable results have been achieved we have still not attained a significant level of export diversification and competitiveness. Our preponderant dependence on a few primary products for export earnings with their fluctuations in price cycles still persists. There are still structural weaknesses in the economies which manifest themselves in low level institutional, infrastructural and capacity development.

These have combined to constitute serious setbacks in our efforts at tackling the problems of supply-side constraints which have prevented us from taking much advantage of the market access opportunities offered by the Uruguay Round.

The experience of some of us with the implementation of the Uruguay Round Agreements has not been pleasant. This is not due to lack of efforts on our part.

Our limited institutional and human resource capacities have made it difficult for us in adapting our laws, regulations and institutions to meet the demands of the WTO Agreements.

Consequently we have been labouring to fulfil obligations without being able to enjoy corresponding benefits. Certainly the poor performance of Africa in the multilateral trading system must be reversed, for Ghana firmly believes that benefits from the global trading system should be evenly shared so as to offer gains to all, especially, African countries.

Against this backdrop, Ghana's preference would have been for a limited negotiating agenda which will not overtax its already limited capacity. But we at the same time realize that it is only through comprehensive negotiations with a balanced agenda that the interest of all countries could be catered for.

Therefore, within the context of such negotiations, Ghana regards the consideration and resolution of issues related to implementation as of the most crucial importance, in fact, as a prerequisite for the negotiations.

Implementation issues of concern to Ghana and other African countries have already been identified. These include, but are not limited to, those related to the imbalances in some of the Agreements such as those on TRIPS and TRIMs; the lack of full implementation of the provisions on special and differential (S&D) treatment for developing countries, and insufficiency of transitional periods.

Some of us will find it extremely difficult to participate in a new round unless we are assured by its agenda that implementation issues of concern to us will be addressed. The imbalances need to be redressed and we deserve flexibilities commensurate with our ability and capacity to implement the eventual outcomes of the negotiations. Such flexibilities should include allowing the use of certain measures for development purposes, the extension of the current transitional periods on request and granting of new ones, where necessary, in a manner that reflect our limited financial, institutional, infrastructural and human resource capacities.

We therefore call upon those of our developed country partners to muster the necessary political will and offer the required support to deal with the problems we have identified. Failure to do this will not only compound our problems and increase our marginalization but also frustrate the achievement of the UN goal to reduce poverty by half by the year 2015.

It is true the WTO must keep pace with technological change to make it relevant to the fast-changing trading environment but our agenda must also be manageable and take account of our individual capacities.

We need to adopt a new approach to technical cooperation that does not only equip beneficiaries with the knowledge of the WTO Agreements but also assist in trade-related capacity building and other infrastructural activities if technical assistance is to effectively respond to our needs. A substantial increase in the resources for technical assistance from the regular budget is required, in order to ensure predictability and timely delivery as well as to meet the expected increased demand resulting from new accessions and the exigencies of the upcoming negotiations. Extra-budgetary contributions and technical assistance from bilateral sources should, however, continue to play a significant role.

There has been much talk about the need to make the upcoming round a development round: a round that addresses the development problems of developing countries. If it is to be a development round in deed but not in words, then the implementation problems identified by the developing countries must be seriously addressed with a resolve not to backslide on previous commitments, especially as regards Special and Differential Treatment (S&D). It is our expectation that this would be done in order to avoid risking leaving a majority of the Organization's membership out of the mainstream of international trade to the detriment of its viability.

Finally, my delegation congratulates Mr. Mike Moore our new Director-General. It is our hope that the new vitality that he will bring to bear on the WTO, will facilitate fuller integration of all developing countries into the multilateral trading system. We see this as the most challenging task of the WTO as we enter the new millennium.
