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Statement by H.E. Mr. Ricardo Cabrisas Ruiz Minister of Foreign Trade

As we approach the end of the twentieth century and five years after concluding the biggest round of multilateral trade negotiations, the global economy reveals that the situation facing the underdeveloped countries is the worst in recent years.

There has been an increase in barriers to trade - not only tariff barriers but also non-tariff barriers and others disguised as environmental protection measures.

Liberalization of trade in agricultural products is a utopia. High tariffs persist, and tariff escalation continues. Production and export subsidies granted by the developed countries distort international trade.

Commodity prices have fallen to levels below those of the 1970s.

Unemployment has risen. Protection of intellectual property rights is increasingly distancing the poor countries from the most advanced technology, thereby contributing to the latter being monopolized by the main industrial powers. Culture is being commercialized.

The external debt is rising. Special and differential treatment in favour of the underdeveloped countries has been replaced by reciprocity between unequals and conditionality.

The growing application of unilateral measures and of extraterritorial extension as a method of exerting political pressure on other countries, large and small, has been the most frequently used weapon in recent times. One such measure, rejected for eight consecutive years by the United Nations General Assembly by an overwhelming majority, is imposed on Cuba by the most powerful nation on the planet, and this also affects the trade of other WTO Members.

What has been the benefit of the liberalization process for the underdeveloped countries?

To what extent have commitments been fulfilled?

The answer is very clear: a reduction in export earnings, more unequal terms of trade, less official development aid, more external debt, greater poverty, more diseases, more marginalization, and more underdevelopment.

The liberalization of international trade cannot be an end in itself. It must be a process which contributes not only to economic growth for the benefit of all countries but also to the development of third world countries.

Maintaining and extending to other sectors trade preferences for the benefit of underdeveloped countries is essential. Special and differential treatment must be a fundamental principle of the WTO, not an exception.

Giving priority to the fulfilment of the Uruguay Round commitments and guaranteeing better conditions of access for the products and services of our countries cannot be delayed.

We represent four-fifths of the Members of the WTO. We produce goods and services with comparative advantages which they now want to snatch away from us on the pretext of respect for supposed labour standards. Unity and solidarity in the WTO are essential to the requirement of reviewing, rectifying and reforming existing international trade rules.

Only in this way can our negotiating power and our capacity for endurance be increased. The preparations for this Conference bear witness to this.

Let us reject the commercialization of our cultural values by the big multinationals.

Let us claim the space that is ours in today's world, a world which needs our raw materials, our textiles, our natural resources, our services, our labour force, our culture, our abilities, but most of all, our development. The world in which we live is unequal and the rules which govern trade disciplines must take this reality into account. Equality among unequals is an injustice and constitutes the most perverse form of perpetuating inequality. Competition among unequals must cease. The hegemonic race to monopolize markets at any price must stop.

Let us demand respect for our trade policies, which are no different from those which countries that are now industrialized pursued at the time for their own development.

Let us globalize cooperation and solidarity.

The solution to the development problems of the Third World countries is of interest to all nations, poor and rich, industrialized or otherwise, since failure to achieve this would have a serious impact on peace and stability. There can be no development without peace and no peace without development.
