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DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Statement by Mr. Luis Manuel Bonetti Veras Secretary of State for Industry and Commerce

It is a pleasure, for the third time, to address the highest body of the World Trade Organization here in this beautiful city of Seattle, the most global of American cities, whose place in the vanguard is known to all.

Our ties with the host country for this event, the United States of America, go well beyond trade and extend to other dimensions of international relations. And in strengthening such relations, we have seen the importance of multilateral bodies like the WTO, since they provide the only hope that the widely-varying levels of market power will be subject to common and impartial rules and procedures.

Consequently, the Dominican Republic joins all those countries that call for a stronger WTO; a strengthening that will start with greater transparency towards all its Members, greater impartiality by all its officials in the exercise of their duties, and an urgent quest for new decision-making procedures that will ensure participation by all Members. This is even more urgent because of the sustained increase in the number of new Members, most of which are from the developing world, thus making it increasingly difficult for a small group of countries to continue to decide on behalf of the others. It is this long-standing practice that seems to explain why it has been difficult for us to reach consensus on a draft Ministerial Declaration.

Consequently, thanks to the leadership of our Constitutional President of the Republic, Dr. Leonel Fernández Reyna, the Dominican Republic has embarked upon a process of *rapprochement* with all our brothers in the developing world, through a strategic alliance with our neighbours in the Caribbean and Central America and active participation in the work of the ACP Group, which led to the Second Meeting of Heads of States of the Group held in Santo Domingo last week.

We firmly believe that it is because of this valuable interaction that we have been able to attend this event considerably better prepared than we were thirteen years ago when the Uruguay Round was launched in Punta del Este. And this has involved more than 35 individual or collective contributions to the preparations for this Ministerial Conference, setting out the major concerns of our producers identified throughout the ongoing consultation process we have institutionalized under the present Government.

We therefore reaffirm our full support for the proposals submitted, as well as the Declarations adopted this year at the Ministerial level by the Group of Latin American and Caribbean Countries (GRULAC) in Santo Domingo in August; by the Group of 77 in Marrakesh in September; and by the ACP Group in Brussels in October, strongly endorsed by the Heads of State of the ACP Group in Santo Domingo last week.

The common feature of all these Ministerial Declarations is our great concern at problems identified when implementing the Uruguay Round Agreements. Since Singapore, we have been drawing attention to the paradoxical situation that arises when the expected outcome of the implementation of the Agreements is not in keeping with the content of the rules, especially in areas of major interest to developing countries, like agriculture and textiles. In Geneva too, we expressed our surprise at the imbalances inherent in the Agreements, which condone the economic policies pursued by the developed countries and at the same time prohibit the very same development tools they used at earlier stages in their histories.

Accordingly, in line with the statements made by our Ministers in GRULAC, the Group of 77 and the ACP Group, in the opinion of the Dominican Republic, beginning with this Ministerial Conference, a process should be initiated:

- (i) To make agriculture subject to the same rules that govern trade in other goods, with the aim of definitively eliminating the subsidies granted by developed countries;
- (ii) to integrate fully in the WTO's activities the objectives and interests of all the developing countries;
- (iii) to apply fully the provisions on special and differential treatment for all developing countries;
- (iv) to ensure consistency between domestic policies and the multilateral commitments undertaken by all countries, by eliminating unilateralism and extraterritoriality as well as the less visible but equally pernicious conditions imposed on preferential access, which have nothing to do with trade. It is this lack of coherence which calls into question the rules of the United Nations and the WTO, for it contradicts the principle of the legal equality of States.

A special mention should be made of the ACP Group's interest in ensuring the waiver for the trade preferences granted by the European Union to our 71 countries; a decision that should also be taken for all the other preferences granted by developed to developing countries.

Again, in the light of the aforementioned Ministerial Declarations, our acceptance of the Seattle Ministerial Declaration will depend on how the implementation problems identified by our countries are resolved in that document. Over and above this issue of the highest priority, the Declaration should confine itself to subjects that are sufficiently mature to begin multilateral negotiations and to those which are clearly trade-related. In this connection, we reiterate the decision by the Ministers in Singapore on labour issues. If, as seems highly likely, consensus is not possible, for the Dominican Republic it will be enough to embark on the negotiations agreed on in Marrakesh in 1994 on agriculture, services and the revision of some of the Uruguay Round Agreements.

In conclusion, we must express our satisfaction at having transposed our pre-Uruguay Round bindings in 1999, and having rectified eight sensitive agricultural products, for which implementing regulations have been issued this month.
