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NETHERLANDS

Statement by H.E. Mr. Gerrit Ybema Minister for Foreign Trade

When I was preparing for our Conference here in Seattle, I was reminded of the man who gave his name to this city, the famous Indian Seattle Chief of the local native tribe in the early days of the State of Washington. In his renowned speech for the newly elected American Governor, he expressed the strong attachment of his people to their native ground, "its green valleys, its wild rivers and majestic mountains". At the same time, Chief Seattle showed a remarkable willingness to share his native country with the newly arrived Americans.

The wise words of Chief Seattle should inspire us all in this Conference. Sharing our prosperity while preserving the beautiful nature that we inherited. Translated to modern days, we would say: economic and social development in a balanced and sustainable manner and for the benefit of all. That should be our main objective.

In this Conference, we have the great responsibility of setting the agenda of the World Trade Organization for the coming years. In my view, we need to address four challenges that are of utmost importance for our common future.

First of all, we need to strengthen the World Trade Organization as the backbone of the multilateral trading system, in order to make sure that international trade is not based on the rules of the jungle but on international law that safeguards the interests of all. To this end, we should increase the transparency and accountability of the Organization, we should see how we can make its rules more responsive to the needs of all Member States and – not in the last place – we should work hard at the early accession of those countries that have not yet joined our Organization.

In the second place, we should make sure that the WTO proceeds on its course of trade liberalization, addressing all those remaining obstacles that hinder trade in an unjustifiable way. Further trade liberalization should benefit all participating countries. Therefore, I urge you all to enter into ambitious negotiations both on industrial products, on agriculture and on services, aiming at a balanced final package in the interest of all.

The New Round that I hope we will launch here in Seattle, should above all be a "Development Round". It is of the utmost importance that this New Round of trade negotiations contributes to the further integration of developing countries in world trade and in the work of the WTO. Especially the least-developed countries deserve our full attention. We cannot and will not accept the marginalization of this group of countries, that should get its fair share of prosperity growing worldwide. To this end, I call upon all more advanced countries to open their markets for the products of the least-developed countries. Giving these countries full opportunities for trade is the first thing we should do. Moreover, however, we should consider how we can assist less-advanced countries in implementing the WTO Agreements. We should discuss how we can make the WTO rules more responsive to the needs of especially the least-developed countries. And above all, we

should assist developing countries in reaping the full benefits of their rights under the WTO. In this context, the Netherlands has participated actively in the initiative for an Advisory Centre on WTO Law, that will provide legal assistance to developing countries in WTO disputes. I am very happy that this important initiative has received such a broad support, both from developing and from developed countries in all continents. Thanks to that, we were able to sign, here in Seattle yesterday, the international agreement establishing the Advisory Centre on WTO Law.

Last but not least, I wish to stress that trade policy cannot be pursued in isolation from other fields of policy. It is very harmful for public acceptance of the important work of the WTO, if its rules are perceived as being an obstacle for effective policy-making in – for example – environmental, health or social matters. I am convinced that we can find ways to ensure that we can proceed on the course of trade liberalization without reducing our capacities for effective policy-making in other fields. Therefore, I hope that we can reach common ground here in Seattle on how to address these issues.

Let me conclude by stating that if we can agree to discuss how to meet the four challenges I have just mentioned, we will be able to go home from Seattle with the satisfaction of having set a proper agenda for the first years of the WTO in the new Millennium.
