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ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

Statement by the Ambassador Kingsley C. A. Layne Head of Delegation Ambassador to the United States and Permanent Representative to the OAS

I bring you greetings from the Minister of Trade and Consumer Affairs of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, the Honourable John Horne, who is the sitting President of the ACP, and is unavoidably absent from these proceedings.

Saint Vincent and The Grenadines is a small vulnerable island state, a member of the Caribbean Community and the wider constituency of the world's small economies. It is easy to overlook the interests of these small states in practice, while making ground statements of support, good intentions and concern for their condition.

My delegation is fully apprised of the many disadvantages which result from diseconomies of scale in vital areas like administration, infrastructural development, transportation, marketing, attracting and retaining high-level skilled personnel and accessing global markets. In addition, the geographical and locational vulnerability of island states, including proneness to natural and ecological disasters, arising from hurricanes, volcanic activity, fragile coastal zones, high population density, and forest depletion, complements economic vulnerability and the impact is made worse by its pervasiveness.

Our desire and resolve to achieve full integration in the multilateral trade system is based on our pragmatic realization that, as President Clinton said at the 50th anniversary of the system, in May 1998, "Globalization is not a policy choice – it is a fact." Globalization, therefore, should not exclude or marginalize any country or group of countries.

As we journey to the meetings everyday since our arrival here, in Seattle, we have often encountered "friendly fire" from the demonstrators, who tried to point out the futility of participating in these deliberations. They represent a wide variety of interests and much of what they have to say is germane to our discussions.

As we enter the first round of negotiations since the establishment of the WTO with its rule-based and power Dispute Settlement Body, SVG understands only too well the need for the WTO to show a human face. We believe that development is about people and that rules are intended to serve mankind and not the converse.

For us, the first real test of the WTO's ability to settle disputes between economic super-powers was played out in the battle royal of the banana case. SVG is one of the Windward Islands producers along with several other ACP producers who are the unfortunate victims in the matter.

In our opinion, this demonstrates very clearly the need for special and differential treatment to be accorded to vulnerable small economies within the WTO. We intend to play our part in ensuring

that the negotiations commencing at this Ministerial should properly address the development dimensions of trade for small vulnerable states.

We too encountered vociferous protests in our country about the benefits of participation in the WTO when it appears to be totally insensitive to the need of small developing countries. Over 40,000 persons in a population of 120,000 wrote letters to legislators expressing great concern about the future viability of our country if the banana industry was precipitously destroyed. These protests intensified when the government insisted on clamping down on the production of illicit alternative cash crops consistent with its international commitment. SVG is determined to be a viable and responsible participant in the international trading system.

We believe that the rules and methods of procedure of the WTO in matters pertaining to dispute settlement should be transparent, fair, and above reproach. Standards that are unthinkable in domestic jurisprudence should not be tolerated in dispute settlement procedures. Judges and presiding officials should be selected with the same meticulous care and concern for fairness that are established norms in national matters of this nature. Parties whose direct interests are at stake should not be excluded from dispute settlement deliberations.

We have been heartened by the facilitation of the intensive preparatory process for this meeting. The Geneva Week hosted for non-resident members of the WTO in Geneva was a useful exercise and we wish to commend the Director-General for his efforts in this regard. It gives us enhanced opportunity to place developmental issues at the heart of the emerging negotiations.

More technical assistance is also required from developed countries to ensure that developing countries build the capacity to take advantage of the opportunities available from globalization by implementation of outstanding Uruguay Round Agreements.

The Caribbean Community has gone to great lengths in its unified preparation for these deliberations. SVG is therefore, at one with all the positions presented by the individual countries of the Caribbean Community.
