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BOLIVIA

Statement by H.E. Dr. Javier Murillo de la Rocha Minister for Foreign Affairs and Worship

There can be little doubt that the issues at this Third Ministerial Conference are a fitting reflection of the tempestuous times in which we live when no sooner has one development been assimilated or one situation been brought under control than another, even more serious situation occurs.

We are not trying to avoid the new challenges, but if confronting them means once again delaying our commercial interests and thereby our opportunities for growth and development, it would be more reasonable to slow down our advance, postpone some of the more complex decisions and commitments whose ramifications we are not yet able to define exactly.

It is not advisable to go too far too fast, particularly when this might exclude whole regions of the world from the benefits of development.

These considerations are directly linked to the broader desires for liberalization put forward at this Conference, and even the World Trade Organization has not been able to deal with its unfinished business, it still has an account to be settled, namely, making sure that all countries participating in the system have fair opportunities for trade.

It cannot be denied that the WTO has led to growth in trade under agreed rules and disciplines. But are these the fundamental objectives? We do not think that this is the case, orderly growth and globalization of trade is not the ultimate objective, it is a means for promoting development, which should be in a spirit of solidarity and fairness and should lead to higher living standards for all peoples.

My country, Bolivia, has been making its contribution to the international trading system for many years through a wholly predictable and transparent broad policy of openness with no sectoral discrimination, reinforced to meet its commitments to the WTO, even though this implies economic, social and even political costs. Its share of international trade has not seen any response to these efforts, an imbalance caused by its limited export possibilities and the serious problems of access to international markets.

I am sure that a similar situation exists in many developing countries, and I say many but not all, because some of them, although they may not be comparable to the major economies, are better prepared, whereas others have clear disadvantages because our economies are small and vulnerable and we warrant special and differential treatment adapted to our own situations.

Consequently, Bolivia is not prepared to accept greater liberalization commitments if their benefits are solely in the interests of other countries and if its legitimate demands are not taken into account. Bolivia will be resolute in seeking a balance.

With this perspective in mind, I should like to highlight one sector of the utmost priority for my country, namely agriculture, which has remained virtually outside the liberalizing disciplines and been the subject of discrimination, although it is precisely this sector that responds to our export interests.

There is talk of the multifunctionality of the agricultural sector, but if this means the multiple impact of this sector, this is precisely what should be taken into account in order to liberalize trade more not to interfere with it. This would help to resolve a large number of the acute social problems in our countries, it would also be an effective contribution to combating poverty because in developing countries, especially those with small economies, the population working in agriculture is the most deprived.

For my country and many others, better access to international markets for agricultural products would also help to combat drug trafficking more effectively. International calls for the eradication of crops used to manufacture drugs are paradoxical when set beside the restrictions and difficulties faced in placing substitute agricultural products on international markets.

Consequently, we shall not speak of multifunctionality in this sector using such a concept to disguise protectionist positions.

This Ministerial Conference must take committed decisions vis-à-vis contemporary society. In advocating a world of freedom, there can be no restrictions on the progress of economy and trade. However, we have to work to ensure that all participate and benefit from these freedoms. It is not enough to note that some countries are better prepared than others and that many may be marginalized. The obligation and meaning of these joint efforts are mutual support, they imply effective protection for disadvantaged countries until they can become active participants in current trade flows. This is the only way to ensure that the international trading system has solid and stable bases.

The WTO will then have dealt with its unfinished business, it will have made its results more democratic and will also have made its decision-making more democratic. It is dangerous for the stability of the system to impose rules and then obligations. A situation in which some States decide the rules and others, the majority, must obey or adapt cannot be allowed to continue.

We are concerned that this Conference has not yet shown open and responsive attitudes to permit agreement. Let us hope that this changes in the next few hours so that decisions that are fundamental for the future of the system are not delayed.

Let us make trade the instrument of peace and solidarity among nations rather than a factor of confrontation and discrimination.
