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SAUDI ARABIA

Statement by H.E. Mr. Osama J. Faqueeh Minister of Commerce

(Speaking as an Observer)

We are delighted to be in Seattle to participate in the Third Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization.

On this occasion, I would like to thank the people and the Government of the United States for their hospitable arrangements and warm welcome.

This Conference is a landmark considering the short history of the WTO. We have gathered here to take decisions of far-reaching implications. The major decision is to launch a new round of multilateral trade negotiations. It is, thus, the responsibility of this Conference to take confidence building measures in order to create a climate conducive for a promising new round. Allow me, now, to highlight some of these measures:

First, the global image of the WTO and the expectations of the new round will continue to be under cloud unless the universality of the organization is assured at the earliest possible moment by accelerating the accession process. This Conference should send a clear message and a strong directive for an early completion of pending applications.

Second, despite past achievements of the Multilateral Trading System, there is a perception among developing nations that its benefits have eluded them. This system imposed painful requirements of compliance upon poorer nations. It is, therefore, imperative that the new round make the needs of developing nations the center of its attention. The Conference should seriously address this issue and take corrective measures to restore and enhance the credibility of the system.

Third, WTO Agreements were concluded after painstaking negotiations, and it is only fair to expect their full and faithful implementation.

Fourth, the WTO prides itself on providing a rule-based trading system including the principles of transparency, predictability and mutual advantages. However, there are no clear rules on accession or broad parameters of its terms. The principle of mutual advantages enshrined in the preamble of the Marrakesh Agreement needs to be strictly adhered to in order to eliminate the main cause for prolonged accession process.

Fifth, the status of plurilateral agreements is an enigma. Acceptance of these is not obligatory. In fact, only a few countries have accepted them. But oddly, acceding countries are pressured into joining these agreements, otherwise their accession is hampered, therefore, this Conference is required to tackle this issue.

The new round of trade negotiations is an ambitious undertaking. Its objective should include securing a fair share for developing and least-developed countries, commensurate with their economic needs. The agenda and scope of future negotiations should be balanced and manageable. It should include the positive agenda proposed by developing countries especially such issues as transfer of technology, appropriate safeguards for LDCs, credit for autonomous liberalization and integration of developing countries into the Multilateral Trading System on equitable terms. Controversial issues such as labour standards and social clauses, on which there is no consensus, should be kept off the agenda.

Let me conclude by saying that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a strong believer in the principles of the Multilateral Trading System and firmly supports its objectives.

We have done our utmost to meet all reasonable demands of our trading partners. Therefore, we sincerely believe that Saudi Arabia can accede to the WTO and actively participate in the new round, if Members refrain from placing excessive demands and agree to a mutually beneficial package of balanced rights and obligations.
