

WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

WT/MIN(01)/ST/86
11 November 2001

(01-5678)

MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE
Fourth Session
Doha, 9 - 13 November 2001

Original: English

SAINT LUCIA

Statement by H.E. Mr Edwin Laurent
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I wish to thank Qatar and His Highness the Emir Hamad Al Khalifa Al Thani for their kind hospitality and the excellent arrangements made on the occasion of this Ministerial Conference.

It is with no eagerness or optimism that Saint Lucia approaches this Fourth Ministerial Conference. Given our historical openness to trade both import and export, it can be said that we are already well integrated into the global economy and the multilateral trading system. But that openness has not been a source of economic strength or development but rather, an instrument of our fragility and susceptibility to external shocks which have wreaked havoc with our economies.

The fall-out on tourism of the events of the 11 September have us tottering at the edge of the precipice of economic disaster. The ongoing slowdown in global economic activity was compounded by the decline in our export earnings from bananas as the effect of liberalization of the EC banana market took hold along with the negative impact on farmers' confidence of the protracted banana dispute. All this has led to a considerable slowdown of domestic economic activity and a spiralling of the unemployment rate.

It is disappointing to us that all members of the international community do not always understand or are sympathetic with our predicament. We are not alone because we share the marginalization in global trade of the countries of the ACP Group and the vulnerability of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) – that group which is amongst the smallest and most fragile of economies.

With respect to the ACP, we find that the legitimate request for a waiver to give legal security to the essential trade preferences for the ACP, are being held hostage as some countries seek to exact concessions from the EC or pontificate that trade preferences are "not in our development interests". But why should we be penalized in this way when we pose no actual or potential threat to any other country?

Small countries like mine are completely marginal in terms of world trade. Saint Lucia's share of merchandise trade is statistically insignificant, being registered as 0.00 per cent. There are other SIDS which account for even less than ourselves. But the membership balks at considering concrete measures to redress our unique constraints emanating from our size, geography and vulnerability.

Sincerity in facilitating the viable participation of our countries in international trade would require among other things:

1. Security of the non-reciprocal trade preferences which are indispensable for our continued access to our few overseas markets.
2. More creative, meaningful and appropriate special and differential treatment.
3. The provision in the rules of the necessary policy flexibility permitting the use of appropriate mechanisms to meet our development objectives.

The declarations circulated by the ACP Group and by the SIDS and Small Developing Economies need to guide the work of the WTO at this Conference and beyond.

It is true that the prospects are bleak but there have, in recent years, been some positive advances in the WTO. Not only has its membership expanded significantly but it certainly is more inclusive than even a few years ago. It is in this connection that my delegation welcomes the approval yesterday of China's accession at the end of its long fifteen (15) year journey.

My country cannot afford a resident mission in Geneva but recent administrative innovations, such as Geneva Week and targeted communications to non-residents, help us feel that we are a part of what is clearly becoming a universal body. But of course, much more is still needed. The WTO will only be truly legitimate if it is inclusive and recognizes and seeks to reconcile the interests of all Members. True, my country is a very small Member which invariably would only make proportionately modest demands on the system, at the same time, however, we who have so much at stake are determined to be more than cheerleaders but to contribute to the fullest of our ability.
