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MADAGASCAR

Statement by H.E. Mr. Jaona Ravaloson
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We are gathered here to celebrate the triumph of universal free trade and the multilateral trading system. Indeed, how could we fail to pay tribute to a mechanism which, despite the differences in the situations and levels of development of its participants, has managed to stabilize and regulate itself, and to infuse trade and production with an undeniable dynamism?

Let us therefore pay homage to this system whose liberalism enables all countries to benefit, at their own pace and convenience.

There are two threats, however, to the stability of this elegant structure:

- The risk of fragmentation, if regional arrangements cannot be reconciled with the dynamics of multilateralism;
- the marginalization of the weakest members, unless there is a concerted and collective effort to include them.

With your permission, I should like to deal briefly with this second aspect. The least developed countries represent the main challenge to economic globalization and the equilibrium of the multilateral trading system. It is therefore important for this First Ministerial Conference to conclude by launching, adopting, endorsing or financing, as appropriate, measures and commitments that will rapidly guarantee the least developed countries full and effective participation in the feast of economic globalization.

This should be achieved, first of all, through the global plan of action for the least developed countries. Then there is also the WTO/UNCTAD/ITC integrated technical assistance programme which deserves to be extended to other agencies such as the Common Fund for Commodities and UNIDO. I therefore take this opportunity to remind the WTO Secretariat of Madagascar's keen interest in this programme and its wish to participate in it and benefit from it as soon as possible.

Nevertheless, over and above these major issues on which broad consensus has already been reached in Geneva, thanks to the cooperation of all Members, the dynamism and tenacity of the Chairman of the Committee on Trade and Development and the hard work of the Secretariat, it would be desirable to take a further step here and now.

I therefore invite members, in particular, the more developed ones, to commit themselves to granting market access to all exports from the least developed countries without tariffs or non-tariff barriers, thereby endorsing the Director-General's bold, common-sense proposal.

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My delegation therefore calls upon all partners of the least developed countries to advocate coherence and coordination in the formulation of policies to help those countries in every international organization, and in particular, in the international funding agencies. Such action should be all the easier now that an agreement has been signed between the WTO and IMF and plans are in place for an agreement with the World Bank. Nevertheless, constant vigilance and unflagging political will be called for on the part of the different decision-making bodies, to ensure that the resounding promises and declarations of good intentions made at one time or another do not remain a dead letter.

If our Conference manages to reach firm decisions or commitments on these few points, we will not have wasted our time, and the WTO will have gone some way towards fulfilling the expectations of the poorest peoples and changing its image as a cold, unfeeling and technocratic institution.

As far as Madagascar is concerned, the emphasis on the least developed countries should be a priority for the WTO.

My second concern is the future work programme of the Organization.

My Government's position in this regard is clear: we must avoid anything that in any way resembles protectionism, and include on the WTO agenda everything that could further liberalize trade and open up markets.

Thus, as regards labour standards, my Government endorses the policy statement on the social clause issued by the International Organization of Employers meeting last June in Geneva. This stated that "the International Labour Organization (ILO) is the international organization with the mandate to seek to improve worldwide working conditions through standard-setting, technical cooperation, dialogue and example". Accordingly, any action by the WTO in this domain should be taken only in close association and coordination with and under the leadership of the ILO, so as to avoid placing further constraints on developing countries and hampering their emergence.

On the other hand, as regards investment and trade, my Government strongly supports any initiative aimed at the active involvement of the WTO.

The fact is that, over and above the problem of market access, least developed countries such as Madagascar are facing a problem of supply. The inadequacy of their production base and their lack of export capacity can only be remedied at this stage by greater and more regular flows of foreign investment. Investment therefore has a place in the deliberations and work of the WTO.

Gradual progress towards a multilateral agreement, preceded, of course, by a process of education and preparation, would surely provide the security expected by investors and would represent considerable savings in time and resources for the least developed countries, which do not have the administrative and financial wherewithal to negotiate a long series of bilateral investment agreements.

I should not like to end my statement without expressing thanks to the Government of Singapore for its warm and friendly welcome and congratulating it on the highly efficient manner in which it has organized this historic and, I hope, decisive meeting of the WTO.

Allow me also to convey the gratitude of the Government of Madagascar to those donors who made it possible for the least developed countries to attend.

There can be no doubt that the first towards ending the marginalization of the least developed countries would be their inclusion in the discussions and work of the Organization.