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Statement by H.E. Dr. Ahmed Goueli
Minister of Trade and Supply

At the outset, I would like to express my thanks and appreciation to the Government and people of Singapore for their generous hospitality and for the excellent facilities provided to us and the WTO Ministerial Conference; the first convened since the entry into force of the World Trade Organization in January 1995.

We came to Singapore with an open mind, hoping that this distinguished Conference shall be successful and will reach balanced conclusions that can contribute to the welfare and prosperity of the world.

It is a matter of fundamental importance to ensure the credibility of our Organization by fostering the implementation in the WTO Agreements and encouraging the Members to abide by their rules and commitments.

For that sake, this Ministerial Conference is devoted primarily to review the implementation of the Uruguay Round Agreements, including the problems which have arisen in the process of implementation, particularly those affecting the interest of developing countries.

This is the first opportunity for us for the stocktaking and reviewing of the activities of the World Trade Organization during the last 24 months, and to decide the future work of this Organization for the years to come.

Since we signed the Final Act embodying the Agreements of the Uruguay Round, most of the developing countries including Egypt were exerting utmost effort to implement all their obligations derived from those Agreements.

In the process of implementation, Egypt as well as other developing countries encountered difficulties. To illustrate that, I would like to refer to two examples:

First: The Ministerial Decision on measures concerning the possible negative effects of the reform programme on least developed countries and net food-importing developing countries. We spent two years debating and deliberating on how to implement the provisions of the said Ministerial Decision with limited success, in addition to the obstacles that were put ahead to prove the real reason behind the increase in the prices of imported food.

Second: The TRIPS Agreement appeared to be one of the most difficult challenges to the Egyptian economy. Despite this fact we proceeded with its implementation in accordance with the terms agreed upon in Marrakesh.

However, we are still looking to receive the financial and technical assistance as provided for in the TRIPS Agreement as an important element of balance.

The balance we have negotiated in the Uruguay Round is delicate. It could easily be disturbed by the misuse of rights under the different instruments. In particular, in the areas of anti-dumping and sanitary and phytosanitary measures, we have witnessed such a misuse of rights. The disturbing effect on trade flows in such areas could be of serious consequence to a developing country like Egypt.

As far as the new issues are concerned, we share the views regarding the importance of these issues. However, we believe that it is necessary to first thoroughly examine, analyse, review, and build consensus on these issues. This revision should be based on their trade relatedness, and the appropriateness of the WTO as a forum of discussion, taking into consideration the limitation of both the WTO's financial resources and the capacity of delegations to cover the requirements of the proposed new commitments.

In this context, we would like to reaffirm our position declared by President Mubarak of Egypt in his statement before the G-15 Summit in Harare last November which was reflected in its "joint communiqué".

With regard to the issue of investment, Egypt looks upon foreign direct investment as a vital and important element that shares in the achievement of the objectives of development and growth. In this area of discussion we would like to assure that we encourage (FDI) through a set of incentives, privileges and guarantees.

Furthermore, we reaffirm the conclusion of the UNCTAD IX which stated that a thorough examination and analysis should be performed in UNCTAD, which can be considered as a basis for the WTO future work.

Concerning the issue of competition policies, it is considered as a very important element of our future work as stipulated in the TRIMS Agreement which should be reviewed in the year 2000. In this regard we acknowledge the importance of the work done by UNCTAD which should continue, including addressing the issue of Restrictive Business Practices (RBPs), until the consideration of this subject matter in the year 2000 within the framework of the built-in agenda in the TRIMS Agreement.

As concerns the question of the relationship between trade and labour standards, we recognize the importance of the issue of core labour standards. However, we believe that this issue clearly falls within the mandate and specific competence of the International Labour Organization, and we stress its fundamental and essential role in this respect.

There remain two important issues of great importance for the future work of the WTO:

Firstly: The relationship between the concept of multilateralism and the increasing trend towards regionalism. We believe that the credibility of the rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory multilateral trading system should not only be the main objective of the WTO but it should also be supported and enhanced by regional economic integration. The latter must be streamlined to ensure the fulfilment of this objective in the case where it shows to be of necessity.

Secondly: In order to serve the issue of the universality of the World Trade Organization and accelerate the reaching of this goal, we confirm the importance of facilitating and improving the procedures of accession, the achievement of which could enhance the role of developing countries within the international trading system. In this regard, technical assistance should be given upon request to countries concerned to ensure a smooth process of their integration in the multilateral trading system.

Finally, I would like to conclude that our short stay in Singapore should be devoted to sincere work and cooperation so as to reach a balanced Declaration and a mutually acceptable agenda for the future work of the World Trade Organization.

We would like to express our appreciation and support to the role of the World Trade Organization under the capable management of Mr. Ruggiero and his staff, Egypt confirms its sincere cooperation with the WTO as a fundamental guarantor of the multilateral trading system.

With high hopes and expectations allow me to extend to Your Excellencies my appreciation, wishing that our meeting will lead to successful results.