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SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

Statement Circulated by the Honourable Conrad Sayers
Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Commerce and Trade

My Delegation and I wish to join the other delegations in congratulating the Government and people of Qatar for the very warm and friendly reception they have extended to us and all the other delegations gathered here over the past couple of days, on what I consider to be a truly historic occasion.

I say historic because this meeting is occurring at a time when there is much to be considered in the context of what development should connote for the international community in the 21st Century and particularly so for small economies and small island developing countries such as St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The accessions of mainland China and Taiwan are remarkable achievements for which the WTO can be proud.

But the success of Doha to which Member States have been alluding to must not be seen as being contingent on the launching of a new round. Instead Saint Vincent and the Grenadines subscribes to the view that the success of Doha will be measured by the levels of compromise achieved by whether or not common grounds will be established on areas such as agriculture, Trade-Related Intellectual Property (TRIPS) issues, the so-called Singapore issues and the call for the strengthening of the provisions relating to special and differential treatment.

It is in this respect that we have weighted the "draft Declaration" and quite frankly have found it lacking in critical respects: I shall mention only a few of these since many have already been mentioned by other Members, many of them from the ranks of the ACP Group, of which St. Vincent and the Grenadines is a Member.

In agriculture, we have seen little which can provide us with the security required to invest further in either traditional or value added products. The lack of any reference to trade preferences on which more than 78 Members, ALL of which can be grouped as being small economies or small island developing States and least-developing countries, is quite frankly somewhat distressing. The lack of specific language which suggests even a glimmer of recognition of small States such as mine renders this text on agriculture of lesser development value to us than the text which emerged during the Seattle Ministerial.

On services another critical development area for St. Vincent and the Grenadines, we must all push for far greater liberalization. Our priorities are tourism, financial and telecommunication services. The movement of natural persons remains a priority for us, the draft text and indeed the negotiations in this area is a matter of concern to us.

The Caribbean is one of the regions in the world with the highest per capita incidence of HIV infections; we must therefore adopt a clear, strong and unequivocal declaration on intellectual

property and access to affordable medicines for all, and we push for a flexible interpretation of TRIPS. This will be consistent with national, programmes in Member countries and with international and regional actions. We seldom have an opportunity to so alter the history of man, this is one of those rare moments, we must not let this opportunity pass us by.

The Caribbean is a region that has a record of sound management of the environment, particularly given our island character and the significant dependence on tourism. But we do not believe that the inclusion of multilateral disciplines in this area is in our best interest. We do believe that with the colossal failure of the Kyoto Protocol and with a world that is increasingly fragile and susceptible to the over-exploitation of non-renewable resources that a "study programme" is warranted.

I am sure many of us here will agree that the initiatives of the WTO in support of capacity-building measures aimed at assisting least-developed and small island vulnerable States as well as small economies are indeed commendable.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines believes that the opportunity that Doha presents us is to enable us, despite our various and differing concerns and interests in respect of the many issues before us, to reach acceptable solutions in the spirit of compromise and based on the principle of consensus for the general betterment of our peoples, thus making globalization work in the interest of all Members, particularly the poor, vulnerable and marginalized.

The ACP-EU request for a WTO waiver in respect of the Cotonou Agreement has been left to languish in an abyss of uncertainty for the past 20 months while our economy steadily contracted from internal-domestic strictures and external vagaries, as are now compounded by the events of 11 September. We are therefore concerned that this matter which as you no doubt know is of vital importance to the economic survival of the many disadvantaged, poor and least-developed countries within the ACP fold is still unresolved due to the indifference of a few. Let me hasten to add though that we commend and support the expressions of the Central American countries of Ecuador, Honduras and Panama to move the process forward as well as the role of our European partners to facilitate this much needed change in that situation. Perhaps no single greater sign that finally we are beginning to become sensitive to each others concerns can be displayed but through the goodwill which could emanate from agreeing to the grant of the Cotonou waiver.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines recognizes that the proposals by some Member States to launch a new round into several new areas may have much merit when considered in the context of their economic needs assessment. Ours is a case as you are no doubt aware whereby after more than five years from signing the Uruguay Agreements we are still unable to effectively implement the majority of the obligations undertaken. To add new obligations to those already undertaken and for which we do not have the capacity to address them meaningfully will serve no useful purpose both to us and the WTO.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines reaffirms its support for a modern multilateral rules-based trading system that is firmly grounded on the principle of democratic participation through consensus; a system that embraces all countries that are willing to abide by the rules, which takes into account the specific circumstances and according to their economic development. At this juncture it is difficult to foresee the launch of a new round as the way out of the global crisis that the world economy has been plunged into without a fundamental rethink of the future agenda of the multilateral trading system

In conclusion, let me indicate that we are prepared to work with all Members on agreeing an agenda, with a scope broad enough to embrace the collective aspiration of all Members, with depth to stimulate sustained growth and development in the economies and financial markets around the globe, and with the prudence to offer meaningful terms for the integration of small economies, including

agriculturally and service-oriented economies which are fragile such as St. Vincent and the Grenadines.
