

**JOINT STATEMENT BY THE SAARC<sup>1</sup> COMMERCE MINISTERS ON  
THE FORTHCOMING FOURTH WTO MINISTERIAL  
CONFERENCE AT DOHA**

New Delhi, India  
23 August 2001

*Communication from Sri Lanka*

The following communication, dated 28 August and addressed to the Chairman of the General Council of the World Trade Organization, was received from the SAARC Regional Co-operation which is known as SAARC. Hence, on behalf of the SAARC member states of the WTO, I am pleased to forward herewith a copy of the Joint Statement adopted by SAARC Commerce Ministers, at the meeting held in New Delhi, India, on 23 August 2001, on the forthcoming fourth WTO Ministerial to be held in Doha, Qatar. This is in continuation of the practice adopted prior to the Geneva and the Seattle Ministerial Conferences.

2. I shall be grateful if the Joint Statement by SAARC Commerce Ministers is circulated in a General Council document as a contribution from SAARC Member countries of the WTO to the preparatory process of the fourth Ministerial Conference.

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1. The Commerce Ministers and the Heads of Delegations of the Member Countries of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) met in New Delhi on 23 August 2001 with a view to consult more closely and to coordinate their national positions in the context of the Fourth WTO Ministerial Conference to be held at Doha, Qatar from 9 to 13 November 2001. The meeting of the SAARC Commerce Ministers and Heads of Delegation was preceded by a preparatory meeting of the Commerce Secretaries of SAARC countries, which was held at New Delhi on 22 August, 2001.

2. The strong commitment of the respective governments was reiterated to work for the further strengthening of the multilateral trading system under the WTO. Recalling the Joint Statement of the Commerce Ministers of SAARC Countries issued on 9 August 1999 at Bandos Islands, Malé prior to the Seattle Ministerial Conference, the utmost importance particularly from the standpoint of developing countries was underlined for a consensual outcome of the forthcoming Doha Ministerial Conference.

3. Progress made in WTO in relation to the resolution of the implementation concerns raised by developing countries in respect of the Uruguay Round Agreements was reviewed. Deep disappointment was expressed on the lack of any meaningful progress despite a clear decision in May

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<sup>1</sup> SAARC Member States are – Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

2000 by the WTO General Council that these issues have to be addressed and decisions taken for appropriate action not later than the 4<sup>th</sup>

equitable benefits sharing for the traditional knowledge used by the patent applicant. Member countries should continue to have the flexibility to determine which *sui generis* system is best suited to provide protection to the plant varieties so as to provide the necessary protection to the existing rights and privileges of their farmers. Higher level of protection should be accorded in the form of geographical indications in products other than wines and spirits so that products of export interest to the region could get the required benefit. The relevant provisions of the TRIPS Agreement relating to the meaningful transfer and dissemination of technology to developing and least-developed countries should be effectively operationalized.

- (e) In the interpretation of the Agreement on Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) in the context of public health, greater flexibility and clarity were required so as to ensure affordable access to essential medicines and life saving drugs in keeping with public health concerns of developing countries. Nothing in the TRIPS Agreement should prevent governments from taking measures for protecting public health.
- (f) Under the Agreement on Trade Related Investment Measures (TRIMs), there should be a positive approach to requests for further extension of the transition period for developing countries. There should also not be any expansion in the list of the

of greater access to the more developed markets. The call to developed countries was reiterated to

14. It was emphasized that the Doha Ministerial Declaration and its mandates should be clear and specific and there should be no scope for ambiguities, constructive or otherwise, as such ambiguities could potentially have the most adverse effect on developing countries. There should also not be any attempt to include new issues at the eleventh hour in the Declaration, which should be prepared on the basis of full prior consultations and consensus.

15. The need to remain in close touch as also to hold another meeting at Doha on the margins of the 4<sup>th</sup> WTO Ministerial Conference was agreed to. The Ambassadors of SAARC countries accredited to the WTO in Geneva were directed to consult more closely on all related matters spelt out in this Joint Statement.

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