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ISRAEL

Statement by H.E. Mr Roni Milo
Minister for Regional Cooperation

On behalf of the Government of the State of Israel, I would like to thank the State of Qatar for the hospitality it has extended us. I would also like to express our appreciation to Director-General Moore and to WTO Secretariat who have worked so hard to organize this meeting.

Special thanks are due to the Chairman of the General Council, Mr Stuart Harbinson, for the hard work and the transparent manner used in building the Ministerial Declaration under discussion here in Doha today.

At a time when the global economy is slowing and international markets are fragile, our Ministerial Declaration can send a message of global unity, of countries united in the conviction that expanding international trade enhances economic development for the benefit of all Members. The launch of a new round of negotiations, continues to have Israel's full support. At this juncture, we are convinced that it would make a significant contribution to bolstering confidence in the multilateral trading systems, and serve as an important stimulus for economic growth, prosperity and employment. Israel has been flexible on the issues to be included in this round, while stressing the importance of a balanced package to ensure that all Members can gain.

In this context, we should continue to focus on the objective of facilitating the economic development in developing countries and addressing their specific needs.

It is particularly important that, in order to maintain efficiency and credibility, the WTO will continue to focus on its mandate – namely the operation of a rule-based, non-discriminatory world trading system, through decision-making by consensus.

As a small country, with few natural resources, Israel is highly dependent on foreign trade, which represent 80 per cent of our GDP. For us, therefore, the expansion of international trade is a top priority.

During the last decade, Israel implemented far-reaching reforms aimed at creating a more efficient and outward looking economy, including a programme of unilateral trade liberalization, complemented by further liberalization through bilateral free-trade agreements and membership in the WTO. We have reduced tariff duties substantially beyond our commitments and obligations within the framework of the Uruguay Round.

We have also liberalized trade in agricultural products beyond the obligations undertaken in the Uruguay Round Agreement.

With a view to improving market access, we have supported multilateral negotiations for further liberalization in both industrial and agricultural products, taking into account the special needs

