

WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

WT/MIN(01)/ST/107
12 November 2001

(01-5694)

MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE
Fourth Session
Doha, 9 - 13 November 2001

Original: English

IRELAND

Statement by H.E. Mr Tom Kitt, TD
Minister for International Trade

I would like to express the gratitude of the Government of Ireland to the Emir and people of Qatar for hosting this, the Fourth Ministerial meeting of the World Trade Organization. Despite the difficult international situation, the preparation and organization of the Conference has been magnificent. They have created the atmosphere needed for us to achieve our objective – to agree on the agenda for a new round of multilateral trade liberalization negotiations which will meet the consensus of all our countries, developed and developing, and so contribute effectively to strengthening the global economy.

In particular I would like to congratulate the Chairman of the organizing committee, Director-General Mike Moore and Ambassador Stuart Harbinson for their work. Their combined efforts, together with the work of all of our representations in Geneva, have produced drafts which can form the basis for serious and worthwhile decisions from this Conference.

We failed very badly in Seattle two years ago. I believe that we have learned from that failure. Transparency, inclusivity, fairness, balance of rights and obligations – these have been the watchwords for our subsequent work and I hope we can put finishing touches to that work over the next few days.

Firstly, I would like to associate my delegation with the statements made to this Plenary by the representative of the Belgian Presidency of the European Union and by the representative of the European Commission.

Secondly, I would like to focus on a number of issues which are of particular importance to my delegation.

International trade is the key to the promotion of economic development and the alleviation of poverty. Ireland's own economic experience over the last decade has shown us how an economy can be transformed through increased trade. This experience strongly suggests that trade is vital for developing countries in helping them boost their economic growth and generate the resources they need to tackle poverty. The launch of a new round of multilateral trade negotiations provides, in our view, the best avenue for developing countries to gain these trade benefits.

We have a common interest in ensuring that developing countries have the capacity to participate fully in the global economy and derive the benefits of trade liberalization. A key area where developing countries need substantive additional support in this regard is in trade capacity building and technical assistance. Many developing countries cannot fully participate in the international trading system because of capacity constraints. The urgent needs of developing countries in this context can only be met through an overall increase in overseas development

assistance and firmer commitment to reaching the UN target of 0.7 per cent of GDP in ODA. My Prime Minister has made an Irish commitment to reach this target by the year 2007.

Ireland attaches great importance to the successful resolution of the access to medicines issue. Effective protection of intellectual property rights is extremely important for economic development particularly in those industries dependent on large research and development expenditures. However, there must be sufficient flexibility to deal effectively with public interest concerns particularly in relation to health. We believe that the TRIPS Agreement contains such flexibility but some clarification of the relevant provisions of the Agreement may be necessary and we must ensure that all WTO Member States are in a position to use those provisions to deal with public health crises. An effective response to this threat posed by such crises will require a comprehensive international effort including other elements such as strong political leadership in the countries affected and increased support for health and social systems. But access to medicines is one vital element and we attach great importance to clear progress being made on this issue at the Conference.

The contribution of agriculture remains vital to the Irish economy and society. Agriculture remains the single most important contributor to the economic and social viability of rural areas. It also continues to play a defining role in the rural environment and landscape. We have this situation in common with other member States of the EU and safeguarding the European model of agriculture is of fundamental importance, therefore, to Ireland and the EU.

Ireland fully shares the EU's objectives for negotiations on Agriculture, including the contribution of the green and blue boxes, equal treatment for all forms of export support and an appropriate balance between trade and non-trade concerns.

It would be wrong and unhelpful to the entire process for WTO Members to insist, at this point, when we are trying to agree only on the framework for these negotiations, that the negotiations themselves should achieve a precise result under any particular heading. On the basis that precise outcomes are not predetermined and that the objectives I have outlined are appropriately provided for in the Declaration, we are willing to enter positively into the negotiations.

There are many other difficult issues to be resolved at this Conference. For example, the issue of trade and labour standards has evoked strong views on both sides. We are anxious that a satisfactory outcome is achieved on this issue which, while recognizing the pre-eminent position of the International Labour Organization, indicates this Organization's sensitivity to the social dimensions of globalization.

I would like to join with other speakers in welcoming the accession of China and Chinese Taipei to the WTO. This will add considerably to the strength of the Organization and I express the hope that the other countries negotiating accession, can join us at the earliest opportunity.

Seldom before has the global economy so needed the support and confidence that can grow from a vibrant world trading environment. Agreement here in Doha to proceed vigorously with the trade liberalization agenda can provide this. We must make every effort to achieve success here.
