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BENIN

Statement by H.E. Mr Lazare Sehoueto
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I should like to thank and congratulate the authorities of Qatar and the City of Doha for giving the WTO the opportunity to hold its Fourth Ministerial Conference. My thanks and congratulations also go to Mr Mike Moore, Director-General of the WTO. Indeed, I regard my presence and that of other so-called least-developed countries at this meeting as one of the major outcomes of the new vitality you have injected into this Organization by promoting greater involvement of these countries in the multilateral trading system. This is an achievement for which I thank and congratulate you and, through you, not only the members of your team but also all the governments whose contributions and political will have made it possible to organize these proceedings. I also congratulate the countries that have recently acceded to the Organization, and in particular the People's Republic of China, with which Benin maintains excellent relations.

On behalf of my country's delegation, I observe that the multilateral trading system has made significant strides in recent years. We should, however, look beyond any legitimate satisfaction that might be derived from these encouraging developments and acknowledge – since this is no secret – that many Members of our Organization find themselves powerless, swallowing their frustration at a situation imposed in the name of political correctness, with the continuously dashed hope that their partners will finally understand their predicament and listen to reason.

Today, there are many of us in the least-developed countries, the ACP and other countries who share that feeling.

It is common knowledge that feelings of powerlessness and injustice are hardly conducive to

The paradox for us developing countries is that our domestic regulations, which provide for full and unrestricted liberalization, based on the rule of law and our strict adherence to the WTO contractual obligations, nonetheless do not allow us to benefit from the opportunities offered by this approach.

For countries such as Benin and many other developing countries that are doing their utmost – with the ardent faith of the newly converted and under the aegis of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank – to dismantle all that appears to them to constitute trade barriers, obstacles and constraints, the question is why the United States of America and the European Communities, for

- (b) the Agreements on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS) and Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT);
- (c) the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights;
- (d) the General Agreement on Trade in Services;
- (e) the issue of special and differential treatment; and
- (f) implementation issues.

Nevertheless, allow me at this juncture to highlight two or three aspects relating to the suggestions which I have submitted to you in detail.

1. The Agreement on Agriculture

For many of our developing countries, our economies and trade are largely based on agriculture or, indeed, a monoculture of speculation. Yet besides the poor economic and political management of which many of our governments, I regret to say, continue to be guilty, I must ask you to bear in mind that the more globalization gathers momentum, the more poverty and extreme poverty spread, so devastating and tragic is the impact for farmers in the least-developed countries of the policies pursued by the United States, Europe, or the newly industrialized countries, which maintain tariff peaks, tariff escalation, barriers of all kinds to prevent agricultural products from the least-developed countries from having access to the markets of developed countries, as well as domestic support, particularly so-called "Green Box" measures.

Meanwhile, if we are tempted to resort to export restrictions on raw materials, which are often justified by sensible domestic policies, we are regularly subjected to industrial intimidation.

2. The Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights

We strongly support the idea that the protection of local or traditional knowledge, including pharmacopoeia and medicine, should be clearly indicated in the Agreement. This provision could be a powerful tool for recovering, for the benefit of humanity, a priceless wealth of knowledge which today remains marginalized. Similarly, it would only be fair to grant farmers the same rights as those obtained by plant breeders.

In addition, relaxation of conditions for the exploitation of patents for essential medicines will lead to improved access to health care for many of the world's peoples, including those in developing countries and particularly least-developed countries, affected by the urgent problems of malaria, AIDS, tuberculosis and other diseases which have a disastrous impact on human life and economies.

3. Implementation issues

I would like to point out that several commitments made concerning least-developed countries have not been fulfilled. Consequently, I would like to see more substantial efforts to pursue and to improve technical assistance and capacity building through the Integrated Framework.

I would like to express my desire to see the waiver for the ACP/EC Cotonou Partnership Agreement granted by the end of this Conference. Autonomous initiatives such as the AGOA, taken by the United States of America in 2000, and the EBA (Everything But Arms), adopted by the European Union at the beginning of this year, are also market-opening measures that other developed countries should be encouraged to take.

The delegation of Benin firmly hopes that the results of this Ministerial Conference will see the continuation of efforts to improve the situation in poor countries. That is a reasonable, and therefore the only sustainable, basis for meeting the major challenges taken on by the WTO. My country, Benin, supports these challenges; they are our challenges, and we will work tirelessly to rise to them, in the interests of our and all the world's citizens.
