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UNITED STATES

Statement by H.E. Mr. Robert B. Zoellick
United States Trade Representative

I want to begin by thanking the Government of Qatar for sponsoring this meeting. Under difficult circumstances, you have provided excellent arrangements for trading nations from all corners of the globe, diverse peoples drawn together by their common interest in economic growth, development, and peaceful exchange. As befits your country and your traditions, the people of Qatar are wonderful hosts – and I thank them, too.

I would also like to express my appreciation for all of the labours of the WTO Secretariat, particularly its Director-General, Mike Moore, and the Chair of the General Council, Stuart Harbinson. You have been patient, indefatigable, and, in my opinion, most effective.

And I would to thank my fellow Ministers. In my nine months in office, you have both helped and inspired me. Your heartfelt support in the aftermath of 11 September has touched me deeply. It is an honour to serve with all of you.

This meeting comes at a critical time. I believe an agenda for new global trade negotiations is within our collective grasp. If we work together, this can be done. This should be done.

Permit me to make five brief observations about our work.

First, all of us know that the international economy is struggling. This year, we expect that US trade in goods and services – which rose 15 per cent last year – will actually fall for the first time since 1982. Global trade will be nearly flat. The September acts of terror have increased uncertainties and risk. Yet with victims from over 80 countries, these acts have also brought us together.

The world needs signs of hope – the hope of economic opportunity and the hope of political purpose shared by almost 150 nations. Therefore, it is particularly important that the message from Doha be that our nations are committed to opening markets, not to closing them. The launch of new global trade negotiations is important for financial market confidence and economic recovery in the short run, and also for economic growth and vitality over time.

It is a fine portent, then, that 14 nations have joined the WTO since its creation and that over the next days we will welcome the accession of the People's Republic of China and Taiwan after a 15-year journey. Both are already major influences on world trade. Their participation in the WTO will be a boost for them and us. So I congratulate their delegations for their hard work, which is now crowned by success.

Second, a new WTO agenda for growth, development, and prosperity through trade liberalization needs to help strengthen the beneficial connection between developing countries and the international economy.

Developing countries already account for more than one third of the merchandise trade. Further liberalization of agriculture would provide a huge boost. And trade among developing nations offers untapped opportunities. The potential is enormous. Just last week, the World Bank explained that the elimination of trade barriers would lift 300 million people out of poverty.

My country recognizes the critical need to combine trade liberalization in the WTO with

tuberculosis, and other epidemics of communicable diseases. I appreciate that there has been much confusion and misinformation about the flexibilities in the TRIPS Agreement that give countries the freedom to get necessary drugs to help deal with health emergencies.

When our work is done here, I hope that we – like our predecessors, 54 years ago – will be