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Statement by H.E. Mr Luis Braga da Cruz
Minister of Economy

It is with pleasure and expectation that I am here today, at the Fourth Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization.

Let me first say a word of deepest appreciation for Qatar and its people. Organizing a WTO Conference is not an easy task. Organizing it under the current international situation is a great contribution by Qatar to our common goals.

The signs of economic slowdown present before the tragic acts of 11 September, have changed into a threat of economic recession.

The multilateral trade system as embodied in WTO must play its role in diminishing such a threat.

We must send a message of confidence and reinforce the stability of economic and trade relations. This objective is of paramount importance.

Hence, we have before us the opportunity to launch a new trade round, as the most important part of an extensive WTO Work Programme for the beginning of the XXIst Century.

During the preparation of this Conference, WTO members have addressed a broad range of issues, reflecting the diversity of concerns and demands that the trading system must answer to in the present day.

As a result of a hard and exhaustive work, we are being called to approve decisions on market access improvement for industrial and agricultural goods, on furthering the integration of developing countries in world trade and tackling their respective difficulties in implementing WTO Agreements, on the future development of new rules in fundamental trade related areas like investment and competition and the clarification of rules in what regards environmental linkages.

This extensive list demonstrates the complexity of trade and economic relations in today's world but also the need to strengthen - and even to re-dimension - the WTO multilateral system.

For that purpose, it is my belief we need a negotiating round with a truly comprehensive dimension.

We have thus to decide upon this vast number of issues.

In my view, we should do so keeping in mind the following objectives:

- to pursue trade liberalization for goods and services;
- to adapt and modernize WTO disciplines to new economic realities;
- to undertake all efforts towards the fullest integration of developing countries in the multilateral system.

This latter aspect is key to success and WTO must adopt measures towards that end.

In order to produce real and effective benefits for developing countries and create conditions of sustainable economic growth, these efforts should be accomplished while strengthening the trade system rules and not through the weakening of the foundations of that system.

This implies creating conditions that allow compliance by all Members, including further transitory periods and enhanced capacity building.

Within this approach we can truly speak of "integration".

The Marrakech Agreements provide an essential and balanced framework of rules, ensuring stable, predictable and non-discriminatory conditions for international trade that should not be questioned.

Modifying this framework outside a negotiation context would definitely weaken the foundations of the system and the trust of both public and private actors.

That is not to say that the multilateral system cannot be improved. It can - that is why we have the objective of launching a new round.

I would especially like to mention Intellectual Property and its relationship with the fight against communicable diseases.

We must affirm the WTO commitment to contribute, within its specific field of action, to the improvement of health conditions in developing countries.

Such contribute can be accomplished through the clarification and effective application of the TRIPS Agreement most relevant provisions, towards the goal of better access to medicines destined to heal and prevent communicable diseases.

In this Conference we are shaping the future of the WTO system. We must adapt it and modernize it, ensuring its coherence and compatibility with international rules on issues like environment, consumer protection, food safety and social development.

Coherence, compatibility and articulation: these are fundamental notions within the present context of growing interaction between nations, companies and individuals, as well as between modernization and development. These are fundamental notions.

This will be a definitive feature upon the accession of The People's Republic of China. We will have the privilege, during this Conference, of welcoming China into the multilateral trade system, an occasion of historical proportions, with an unprecedented impact on international trade and economic relations.

I would also like to greet the accession of the Chinese Taipei to the WTO.

I believe the key elements to achieve success, satisfying the interests of all Members, are balance, coherence, reciprocity and the strengthening of the multilateral trade system.

We shall no doubt work within the same constructive spirit that has presided the Ministerial Conference's preparatory process, and will succeed in launching a new round that will provide an essential contribution to the process of trade expansion and economic growth worldwide.
