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## THE GAMBIA

### Statement by the Honourable Musa Hassa Sillah Secretary of State for Trade, Industry and Employment

Let me begin by joining all those who spoke before me in congratulating you, on your appointment as Chairman of this august assembly. I am confident that you will steer the course of this very important Conference to a successful conclusion.

I would also wish to extend to His Highness the Emir, the Government and people of this beautiful country, Qatar, the deep gratitude of the Gambian delegation for the warm welcome and generous hospitality accorded to us since our arrival and for the excellent facilities which have been put in place for the smooth conduct of the Fourth Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

The Gambia, with a population of just over a million people, is among the group of Least-Developed Nations of the world, with GDP per capita estimated at \$320. For countries in that category, with very little share in global trade, the process of attaining socioeconomic development poses a lot of challenges. The political system in The Gambia is a multi-party democracy that elects its President every five years, The most recent Presidential election was held on 18 October 2001 which was described by international observers as one of the most free, fair and transparent in Africa. His Excellency President, Dr. Alhaji Yahya A. J. J. Jammeh, won with a clear majority of 53 per cent at the first round of the polls. Economic activity in The Gambia, is largely based on the production of a narrow range of goods and services. Agriculture is the mainstay of the economy. Groundnuts, fish and few primary commodities such as cotton account for over 70 per cent of total export earnings. The Gambia Government follows an export strategy based on a free and liberalized trade regime. Trade as a subsector plays a major role in the development of the Gambian economy. The Gambian Government formulated among other things, trade and investment policies aimed at developing key sectors of the economy, through development of the human resource base, basic infrastructure and the private sector, that would thrive on WTO principles of free trade.

However, the development needs of the country, the new developments in the multilateral trading system, and the permanent institutional arrangements embodied in the WTO as well as increasing globalization and liberalization, call for a reorientation of the trade policy in The Gambia. We are currently, updating our trade policy in accordance with our obligations as a Member of the WTO.

I am sure many of the LDCs are engaged in similar efforts. However, these efforts must be fully supported by the developed nations if the aspirations of developing countries are to be realized. The marginalization, deprivation and poverty in the developing countries should be a global concern. The WTO needs to redouble its efforts in establishing itself as an institution capable of meeting the aspirations of all its Members. It is imperative that we have a trade system and an institution supportive of and positively contributing to the development of developing countries. In this regard,

the WTO must fully recognize the real differences amongst its Members in terms of resources, trade volumes and above all, size and levels of development, while endeavoring to maintain its agenda in tune with the dynamics of international trade and globalization.

In my address to the Third Ministerial Conference in Seattle, I reported the Gambian Government's concern about the Integrated Framework, as The Gambia was one of the first few countries, then, to have convened in November 1999 in Geneva a round table conference on trade, investment and private sector development, within the context of the Integrated Framework for LDCs. I am now pleased to report that some progress has been made within this framework, as some funds, albeit small, have been recently committed to The Gambia, for technical assistance in key sectors of the economy.

We welcome this development and hope that further progress would be made to substantially increase the level of technical assistance for The Gambia to complement the efforts of the Gambian Government in its bid to reduce poverty and improve the living standards of her people. The thrust of the revamped Integrated Framework is more results-oriented and the coordination mechanism seems to be better now. I urge the six coordinating agencies and other development partners to speedily and effectively implement the Integrated Framework for Trade-Related Technical Assistance for all LDC's and to commit new and additional resources to the trust fund.

In this regard, I wish to urge the WTO Secretariat, in close collaboration with other international and intergovernmental organizations, including UNCTAD, the World Bank and the IMF to reinforce technical cooperation in developing countries, particularly LDCs, as well as vulnerable economies in transition in overcoming obstacles to their effective participation in the implementation of existing WTO commitments. In the same vein, I would wish to also implore the WTO and the international community to work out a framework that would allow small countries, like the Gambia, which are non-resident WTO Members to be represented in Geneva at costs our governments can sustainably afford.

The Gambia, like other developing countries, is preoccupied with implementation issues of the Uruguay Round Agreements including the built-in agenda, with particular emphasis on issues of market access for our products and contentious issues on agriculture and subsidies.

We hope that this Ministerial Conference would focus on the review of the international trading system with a view to taking decisions that would redress the existing imbalances and at the same time find concrete and effective measures to address implementation issues of WTO agreements, to which we are fully committed.

In this vein, may I reiterate the call already made by so many developing countries, particularly the least developed, for this Conference to place emphasis on stocktaking of issues relating to market access and subsidies, capacity building and supply constraints and mandated negotiations on Agriculture and Trade in Services.

The preferential market access that the EU has granted to ACP countries through the Lomé Convention, now the Cotonou Accord, has so far failed to boost the export earnings of ACP countries. However, The Gambia intends to make use of the market access opportunities offered under the EU-ACP new Partnership Agreement. Thus it is my conviction that any new negotiations within the WTO system should take due note of these concerns, particularly, within the framework of the new EU initiative on preferential market access described as "Everything But Arms" (EBA). These preferential arrangements should be complemented by elimination of all non-tariff barriers (NTBs), in the markets of developed economies and provision of technical assistance for more efficient and competitive export production.

