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DOMINICA

Statement by H.E. Mr George Williams Ambassador, Permanent Representative to the WTO

Let me join those who have spoken before me in thanking the Government of Qatar for the excellent arrangements they have made for this conference and for their generous hospitality.

In the aftermath of the Seattle fiasco, attention was rightly focused on restoring confidence in the WTO and the multilateral trading system. The failure at Seattle and the nature of that failure lead many to question the very legitimacy of the WTO project. At Seattle developing countries had spoken with a loud and single voice about their deep dissatisfaction with what up to that time was a most unsatisfactory WTO process. They called for change of a kind that would recognize and accommodate their development concerns and, in this connection also, they called for special attention to be given to the unique interests of vulnerable under-resourced small economies, in particular the small island developing States.

Two years after Seattle and on the eve of the possible launch of new negotiations in the WTO, it seems to many that the lessons of Seattle have hardly been learned. The call appears to have gone largely unheeded and the exercise of confidence building has achieved little. That is why the Commonwealth of Dominica fully supports the Declaration by Ministers of Foreign Trade of the African, Caribbean and the Pacific Group of States done at Brussels on 6 November last and circulated at this conference.

It is against this background that the Commonwealth of Dominica gives its response to the call, mainly by the industrialized countries, for a new so-called "Development Round". We have listened to the arguments being put forward in support of a round, including the argument that a round involving new issues is the only way that developing countries can have their concerns relating to implementation, imbalances in the existing arrangement and other concerns, adequately addressed.

For small island developing States like the Commonwealth of Dominica with a population of less than 100,000 people the possible launch of a comprehensive round of multilateral trade negotiations is a source of considerable trepidation. Earlier this year in June Dominica was subjected to two mandatory reviews at the WTO, namely the trade policy review and a review of its intellectual property legislation. These two exercises alone stretched to the limit our capacity to implement commitments and obligations already entered into under the Uruguay Round Agreements. It will be understood therefore that on the grounds of implementation capacity alone we cannot view with enthusiasm the prospects of assuming further obligations of the kind that would inevitably flow from the negotiations which some countries now seek.

In terms of the expected benefits accruing to a country like mine - increased investment flows and trade growth - the experience does not give cause for optimism. When I hear the figures being quoted from this podium, regarding the gains that have been recorded in international trade and global

incomes resulting from the Uruguay Round Agreements I listen with envy. All of this growth has passed me by. Exports from Dominica are lower now than they were even five years ago and they continue to fall due in large part to uncertainties regarding the future of preferences for the one or two export commodities that account for over 70 per cent of total exports.

We hear about the massive investment flows that have been features of globalization. Some of us have made great efforts to introduce measures, including the adoption of best international practices, in order to attract the investments needed for economic restructuring and diversification. But the investments have failed to materialize; and the enjoyment of the fruits of global prosperity remains a very distant dream.

Yet despite its experience Dominica remains fully committed to the WTO. It is a founding Member of the Organization. It strongly believes that a rules-based system grounded in international law is its best guarantee against unilateral and arbitrary action by bigger more powerful States. In its own small way Dominica will continue to support those who work for a multilateral trading system strengthened and improved in ways that make it more responsive to the real development challenges facing all its Members. It is in this connection that Dominica joins other small island developing States and other small economies in calling on the WTO to take their vulnerabilities into account and implement special measures to help them overcome their unique disadvantage and to better integrate