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STATEMENT BY H.E. MR. PÉREZ DEL CASTILLO CHAIRMAN OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL

In Geneva, on 11 August, we embarked on the last stage in our preparatory process for this Ministerial Conference. The work was done on the basis of a skeletal Draft Ministerial Text which I, in my capacity as Chairman of Council, had submitted on 18 July. It had many gaps and lacunae and it reflected the situation we were facing, one marked by a lack of concrete results and many unmet deadlines on a number of matters since the Doha Conference. In addition, there were still highly divergent positions among Members on most topics and it was plain that it had not been possible to start a real negotiating process, particularly on key issues for this Round, such as agriculture. In short, we were facing a delicate situation a few weeks away from Cancún and the prospects of a successful outcome to this Conference were seriously jeopardized.

Since then, and in the past four weeks of this preparatory process, we have seen very encouraging changes. Ambassadors and high-ranking officials in Geneva worked long and hard and new proposals were put forward that energized the process and made for substantive negotiations on all the items on the agenda. A good climate prevailed, along with a constructive and flexible attitude among all Members, and there was a clear readiness and a joint effort to search for common ground and reach understanding on complex and politically sensitive matters.

I have to say, as Chairman of the General Council, that I am satisfied with the process that has just ended in Geneva. First of all, on account of the transparency and inclusiveness of the process. All Members, without exception, played a broad and active part in the daily open-ended meetings that were a feature of this process. The transparency and inclusiveness of the process have built up confidence and credibility - an important factor that must endure and be reinforced during this Conference.

Secondly, obvious headway has been made in the negotiating process. The most important agreement is the one already mentioned on Intellectual Property and Public Health and I need add no more in this connection, except to say that it is auspicious for the start of our negotiations in Cancún. But progress has not been confined to this area alone. Following intensive work, it has been possible to produce an initial package of 25 proposals on Special and Differential Treatment submitted by developing countries, and a commitment to pursue our work in this area. In addition, signs have emerged from the preparatory stage of understandings on texts concerning many other items to be taken up by the Ministers. Progress has been made on other issues and the texts have reached a stage that will possibly make for agreement given a positive overall context. It has also been possible to arrive at understanding on a framework approach for agricultural modalities and non-agricultural market access. However, it should be emphasized that, as on the so-called Singapore issues, there are still great divergences among Members with regard to the substance of these issues.

As the outcome of these long and intensive meetings and consultations of various kinds I have submitted to this Conference, on my own responsibility and in close cooperation with the Director-

I should like to end by thanking all Members, as well as the Director-General and all his team, for the enormous support I received in this preparatory stage. My thanks go to you, President Fox, to Secretary for Foreign Affairs Derbez and to the Government and people of Mexico for acting as hosts at this important meeting and for their generous hospitality.

I should like to assure all Members that it has truly been an honour for my country and for me personally to have led this preparatory process and I should like to reiterate my unfailing readiness to continue here to support the Chairman of the Conference and all other Ministers in the important endeavour of making sure that this meeting is a success and will fulfil the legitimate expectations placed in it by so many millions of people.
