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LEBANON

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(Speaking as an Observer)

From the eastern shores of the Mediterranean to the Gulf of Mexico there are 20,000 kilometres, and a bit. We have traversed them, coming from Lebanon, a country that was born with trade and the alphabet and has been globalized for 6,000 years; its liberal and open vocation even before its official accession to the WTO makes it both an ancestor and a child of the WTO.

In Mexico, where so many of our immigrant children have found hospitality and success, I should first like to express our deep gratitude. I thank President Fox and the people of this great country, expressing the hope that, in an atmosphere of prosperity and stability, they will assume their guiding role and occupy their place as a bridge at the heart of the Americas.

To the Chairman of this assembly, to the Members of the WTO, its Director-General and all those who have worked untiringly to make this a framework for a world in which trade will benefit all, I express my support, my respect and my wishes for success.

As we have already seen with the problems that faced GATT and the work made during the Uruguay Round, the task is not an easy one. From 1995 until now, agreements have been born in pain. Perhaps as a result of our detached status as an observer, we have been able to see the delays
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We would also like to see progress in the agricultural sector in the form of an end to subsidies. We have already said, and we repeat once again, these subsidies exacerbate the distortions, accentuate disparities and leave the poorest starving. As to the opening of markets for non-agricultural products, this should be in both directions along the lines of the modalities and should not hamper the development of industries in third world countries, while at the same time allowing their products to have access to the markets of the most-developed countries.

Because we find ourselves in Cancún, in this land of Mexico that has suffered so much and among people who are well acquainted with struggle, it is the time and place to undertake a more in-depth examination of the open wounds undermining the global economy. Here, more than elsewhere, we must give equitable agricultural policies, more human trade choices and respect for cultural diversity back their place. We must not misunderstand. The voices we are hearing from outside, even though they are muffled by distance or security measures, are representative of billions of people who are not necessarily anti-globalization but who do not understand why, at the dawn of the 21st Century, a new global system is sweeping away the values of justice, equality and solidarity already achieved in the name of freedom that is relative.

I should also like to draw this assembly's attention to the vague attempts made to segregate certain States whose candidatures have until now been totally and deliberately ignored. The status of "the United Nations of trade" cannot allow trade exclusion policies that reflect political exclusion. I am thinking of the Syrian Arab Republic, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Palestine Authority. I am also thinking of certain organizations, particularly the Arab League and the International Francophone Organization which, for the same reasons, still find themselves outside the doors of the WTO claiming a minimum right, namely, that of permanent observer.

If the Cancún Declaration is not to be a feeble repetition of the Doha resolutions so as to ensure that this Mexican phase of the WTO's existence marks and determines the future of the Organization, we call on you to give a better hearing and arrive at a better understanding. It is by listening to those that have less that the most balanced decisions are formulated. It is through agreement with the South that the North will prove that its intention is indeed to promote development and not to resuscitate colonialism.

If necessary, we should not be afraid to extend the timetables. It seems to me that 1 January 2005 is very close and the results to date are extremely modest.

In the months to come, Lebanon will continue its negotiations on accession to the WTO. It will do so with full confidence because it already meets the majority of the criteria for accession. A large number of laws have been adopted and legislation that is not in conformity has been repealed or amended. It will accede with the firm conviction that small countries can defend great causes. It will do so less because it seeks to avoid marginalization than because it hopes that the Organization to which it will accede will not allow itself to be marginalized and will make international trade a tool for sustainable and balanced growth of benefit to the peoples of this planet.
