

# WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

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MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE OF THE TRADE DEVELOPMENT BANK (MTDB) - 102 TmTmTmTmT37Tc[ Tf0 -1138 Fb03 8(M)334 T(MIERI)Fifth)-5sior n91 SMIER

Minister for Commerce and Industrial Development, in Charge of NERD

On behalf of the President of the Gabonese Republic, H. Excellence El Hadj Omar Bong, and the Government of Gabon, I thank you for your initiatives and endeavors to stimulate international trade and improve the organization and fairness of the trading system.

since Gabon, like many other developing countries, has commitments at the subregional (CEMAC, ECOCAS), and regional (African Union) levels, or again in the context of the ACP/European Union partnership, and the AGOA, which are crucial instruments for building competitive economies.

Gabon has a stake in consolidating the multilateral framework through the improvement and clarification of the existing rules. However, as we have always stated, any deepening of the negotiations and any extension to new fields presupposes implementation of the commitments undertaken by the different parties, and consideration of the following key factors:

- The need to genuinely incorporate the development dimension through the effective implementation of special and differential treatment;
- the definition of effective sustainable development policies;
- adherence to a reasonable, pragmatic level of ambition, so as to avoid over-elaborate, and therefore unrealistic, commitments;
- consideration of the situation of countries with small populations;
- the need to introduce more flexibility by basing any new multilateral agreement on consensual general principles; such flexibility should guarantee that a fair balance is struck between multilateral commitments and autonomous national policies. In the final analysis, it is necessary to promote maximum coherence.

This coherence, which must be both national and international, would be reflected in greater coordination of policies among the development institutions and the other multilateral organizations, including the IMF, the World Bank, WTO, etc.

Gabon is no stranger to the ills afflicting most developing countries, namely: economic crisis, excessive debt burden, AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis, persistent poverty.

Gabon's current classification as an upper middle income country is unfair and quite wrongly prevents it from being eligible for all existing preferential schemes in respect of debt, financing and various supports.

Moreover, Gabon, which depends on foreign countries for nearly 85 per cent of its food requirements, will now endeavour to have its net food importer status recognized in order to confirm this economic and social reality and receive the attendant benefits; its food security depends on this.

Participation in world trade must be of potential benefit to all countries, otherwise such trade will continue to be perceived as unequal. In this connection, we particularly support the sectoral initiative in favour of cotton and hope that, in due course, it will be extended to other basic commodities. Similarly, we support all initiatives aimed at curbing mechanisms that distort the free operation of the market, including in particular subsidies which heavily penalize producers in developing countries.

Our countries are increasingly committed to taking control of their own destinies. That is the significance of our commitment within NEPAD, which recently moreover, on 12 August 2003, was made a ministerial department in Gabon, this being an obvious sign of the particular emphasis and hope which Gabon attaches to this important programme. It is only natural that we should once again request decisive support from the international community for the immediate and gradual implementation of NEPAD.

I should like to conclude by once again expressing Gabon's deep and sincere appreciation and encouragement for the undeniably efficient contribution of the various participants in the Fifth WTO