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TURKEY

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I would like to thank the Swiss authorities, the representatives of the missions in Geneva and the WTO Secretariat for this excellent organization.

The second Ministerial Conference of the WTO, coinciding with the 50th Anniversary of the multilateral trading system, carries additional importance beyond its agenda.

For the last 50 years, the global community has witnessed valuable efforts to liberalize world trade under the auspices of the GATT and the WTO.

Turkey is a committed supporter of the WTO and what it represents. We are convinced that a liberal international trading system based on the principles of free competition, non-discrimination and elimination of barriers to trade are in the interest of the global community. Trade policies pursued by Turkey since the 1980s have vindicated this approach.

Since the unity of the developed, developing, least-developed and transition economies is the most valuable asset of the WTO, a balanced approach observing the interest of all WTO Members should be ensured.

Furthermore, due consideration should be given to

not only for their economic development but also for global trade expansion.

Within this context, I would like to express my satisfaction over the results of the initiatives taken since the first Ministerial Conference. We, the Ministers, had accepted a Plan of Action aiming at achieving better market access conditions for the least-developed countries and enhancing their trading opportunities. In accordance with this decision, Turkey, on an autonomous basis, has put into effect a comprehensive preferential tariff regime for the products originating from the least-developed countries as of 1 January 1998.

I hope common belief that the success of the multilateral trading system can only be attained by ensuring all countries' participation. At this point, I would like to point out the importance of providing technical assistance and capacity building programmes for developing and the least-developed countries. I believe that these activities should

also offer technical information regarding the WTO notification requirement which is directly related to the proper functioning of the Organization.

Since its establishment, the WTO has proved its indispensability with its 132 Member countries and with many others waiting to join. In this context, Turkey has always supported the applicant countries on their way to becoming WTO Members. We are confident that their accession will greatly contribute to the global welfare.

With this in mind, we sincerely hope to see that the ongoing negotiations for accession of applicant countries are concluded by the next Ministerial Meeting in 1999.

On the other hand, as the Turkish Government attaches value to the trade-creating effects and the complementary dimension of the Regional Trade Agreements in the world trading system, we take pleasure to see that the number of such agreements increased considerably after the 1990s. In fact, 69 regional agreements were notified to the GATT/WTO out of which 50 agreements have been notified during the post-1990 period.

In this specific context, I wish to make reference to Turkey's customs union experience with the European Union which resulted in much lowered customs duties and in turn better market access for third countries in industrial products.

I would also like to express my satisfaction regarding attainments reached within the framework of the Information Technology Agreement (ITA). As an original party to the Agreement, Turkey considers that this sectoral initiative is another positive step taken to reach freer trade.

The decision taken for the elimination of tariffs in the area of information technology was perhaps one of the most significant outcomes of the Singapore Ministerial Conference. I hope it will bring out its positive repercussions in the very short-term not only in information technology sector but generally in overall prosperity. In this context, I would like to express my belief that

The WTO also provides us a forum to negotiate trade and trade related issues, in the fields that have not been covered by the WTO Agreements. Within this context, I would like to note with satisfaction the efforts proceeding in the