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BELARUS

Statement Circulated by H.E. Mr. Mikhail A. Marinich,
Minister of Foreign Economic Relations
(As an Observer)

On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Belarus let me first to express the gratitude to the Government of Switzerland as well as to Director-General, Mr. Ruggiero and his staff of the WTO Secretariat, who have made great efforts to prepare for this Conference. Belarusian delegation highly appreciates the opportunity to participate in this international forum.

The Second WTO Ministerial Conference is a historical event. This year the international community celebrates the golden jubilee of the multilateral trade system GATT/WTO. This jubilee opens a new chapter of the history of the World Trade Organization, which has united industrialized, developing, least-developing and transition economies under the common framework of rules.

Conclusion of the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs marked the dawn of a new era of the world economy. The established multilateral organization has developed gradually into unprecedented in its scale economic system. Joining of new Members in the nearest future will complete the construction of a universal trading system.

I wish to assure that the Belarus' accession to the World Trade Organization is the top priority in our foreign trade policy. We are confident, that our integration into liberalized and open world trade regulated by clear and non-discriminatory norms and principals of this most respected, in our opinion, economic organization, will have the positive impact on economic reform in our country and help us find a way out of continuing crisis, secure dynamic growth and development.

The current speed of economic reform in Belarus can be accounted for by a wide-range of complex interrelated factors. Transition from the centralized economy which existed for decades, to an absolutely new to us market type of economic policy is exacerbated by the absence of either scientifically or practically proven general methods used for management of such a process, to say nothing of those that consider specific features of a given country.

For the period of economic crisis the general domestic product has been reduced by more than 35 per cent. A sharp decrease in investment activity is also an aggravating factor for the transition of our economy: the overall capital investment is now at the level of slightly higher of one third of 1990. The current capital inflow is only used by companies to pay salaries and provide social support.

The process is plagued by various social and demographic problems as well as by the ever-pending burden of the Chernobyl accident rehabilitation programmes. We provided the WTO Secretariat with the document which describes the global character of the damage, inflicted on Belarus by this catastrophe. It contains a clear message that our

disaster. The losses our country has suffered are irretrievable and the remediation of the aftermath will take future generations decades. It caused damage evaluated in US\$235 billion for the 30 years from the date of the accident, that constitutes 32 state budgets of Belarus in 1985.

For Belarus, which is situated between the East and the West of Europe,

tools for the achievement of the country's economic development, but there is no other alternative for us except the pragmatic approach to the solution of the existing problems in this field.

In the light of the above, I would like again to draw the attention of the WTO Member States to transition economies. Integration of these countries should both finalize the construction of the world trade system and solve a number of their internal specific economic problems. This year the Republic of Belarus will move to another stage of accession to the WTO - the stage of bilateral negotiations on market access in goods and services. So I hope that the dialogue with the WTO Member States will be constructive and mutually beneficial.

In conclusion let me express my gratitude to the Member States of the Working Party on Belarus' accession to the WTO for their support of our efforts during the Second Meeting.

I wish to take this opportunity to congratulate all delegations of the Forum on the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the establishment of the world multilateral trading system.
