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BOTSWANA

Statement by the Honourable Tebelelo Seretse
Minister for Trade, Industry, Wildlife and Tourism

1. Let me at the outset join my colleagues who have preceded me in congratulating you on your election as Chairperson of this Fourth WTO Ministerial Conference. We are confident that under your able leadership this Conference will be a success. I would also like to seize this opportunity, on behalf of my delegation, to express our gratitude and appreciation to the Government and the people of Qatar for the warm hospitality that has been extended to us since our arrival. We are also grateful for the excellent arrangements that have been put in place to facilitate the success of the Conference.
2. Allow me to pay special tribute to the Director-General of the WTO, Mr Mike Moore and the Chairman of the General Council, Ambassador Stuart Harbinson for their untiring efforts in preparing for this Conference. We are mindful that the preparatory process of this Conference was not an easy task.
3. Botswana is greatly honoured to serve in the Bureau of this Fourth WTO Ministerial Conference. We are humbled by this vote of confidence in our country. We will do our best to meet your expectations.
4. This Conference is taking place seven years following the signing of the Uruguay Round Agreements that resulted in the formation of the WTO. Since then, Member States have had time to reflect on their experiences with implementation of the Uruguay Round Agreements. It is therefore appropriate that their views and experiences are taken into consideration here and in the future work programme of the WTO.
5. One of the concerns that have been consistently raised by developing countries is their lack of capacity for implementation of the Uruguay Round Agreements. The developing countries have cited lack of technical expertise and inadequate institutional capacities as the major constraints accounting for their inability to meet their obligations under these Agreements.
6. While we fully appreciate the efforts made by the Director-General in addressing the concerns of the developing countries with regard to implementation and capacity building, it is a matter of great concern to my delegation that these issues have up to now not been resolved. Capacity building, especially for least-developed countries and small economies should be given the priority they deserve. We want to underscore the importance of making technical assistance and capacity building integral parts of the work programme of the WTO Secretariat, given the implementation problems faced by most developing countries. While we recognize that some efforts have been made by Member States to support the increase in the regular budget of the WTO to cover technical assistance, this is still not adequate to meet the needs of developing countries.

7. Botswana is a firm believer in the multilateral trading system. The benefits of trade liberalization have, however, not been equitably distributed. The globalization process continues to marginalize developing countries. It is for this reason that Botswana supports the proposals by other developing countries that special and differential treatment is a core principle of the multilateral trading system and must be made meaningful and operational. We also support proposals that development issues must be brought to the centre stage of the WTO work programme.

8. Botswana is a semi-arid landlocked country that is dependent on exportation of a few commodities. The majority of the population is dependent on subsistence agriculture. The only agricultural export is beef and the country is a net food importer. The negotiations on the Agriculture Agreement must therefore take into consideration the concerns of net food importing countries and ensure that the Ministerial Decision with respect to the impact of agricultural reform on net food importing countries is fully operationalized.

9. Diversification of the economy is a major policy objective for Botswana. Given the country's small internal market and limited raw material base, international trade has to play a critical role in our economic development strategy.

10. The multilateral trading system must recognize the specificities of vulnerable economies like Botswana in order to facilitate their integration into the global economic system. Some WTO Agreements need to be reviewed and amended to enable developing countries to implement their development policy objectives.

11. One matter of major concern to developing countries, particularly the ACP Group, is that the application for a waiver for the Cotonou Agreement is still pending in the WTO. The continued delay in approving the waiver is undermining the confidence of ACP Member States in the multilateral trading system. It is extremely important that this waiver be granted so that developing countries such as Botswana can continue to enjoy trade preferences while they are preparing for WTO compatible trade arrangements in the future.

12. Botswana is also heavily affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. In this regard, the Government has been working tirelessly to mitigate the negative impact of this pandemic on our nation. We therefore welcome the debate in the WTO regarding the interpretation of the TRIPS Agreement with respect to access to medicines at affordable price. The people of Botswana can certainly benefit from cheaper antiretroviral drugs. It is for this reason, that my country supports proposals by developing countries for a flexible interpretation of the TRIPS Agreement in order to address their public health concerns.

13. My delegation is concerned that we reached Doha without having reached a consensus on the Draft Ministerial Declaration. It is nonetheless my hope and expectation that, during this Conference, the Ministers will have the political will to narrow their differences and move the Conference towards a successful outcome.

14. In conclusion, I would like to observe that our success here at Doha, will in the long-term, be measured by the extent to which poverty is reduced and the ability of developing countries to effectively implement their WTO obligations.
