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MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE
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OPENING ADDRESS BY H.E. MR YOUSSEF HUSSAIN KAMAL
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MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE OF THE WTO

Your Highness the Emir of the State of Qatar, Your Highness the Crown Prince, Your Highness the Prime Minister, Your Highness the Deputy Prime Minister, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to Doha

It is a great honour for us to host the Fourth Ministerial Conference of the WTO, the Organization that succeeded the GATT in 1995 and acquired a special importance in the last 6 years.

The subjects before us in the next few days are very important. We hope we will address them wisely and carefully, and that we could reach the necessary consensus. Everybody is watching us. Your responsibility and mine are great and we have to work together to ensure the success of the conference. Everybody is waiting for decisions that are tangible and practical, ambitious yet realistic.

We have in front of us a draft declaration that reflects the aspirations of many of us. We know that some of you have reservations on parts of it, and this is normal, but we have to reach eventually the solutions that satisfy all.

The implementation of the Uruguay Round Agreements represents for many developing countries an issue of vital importance. These countries think, and rightly so, that many of the benefits of the Uruguay Round did not materialize. This should be addressed and a mechanism for dealing with these issues be created. Some of these issues require clarification, some interpretation, some proper implementation, and some finally require amendment.

In dealing with these issues, we have to be realistic and flexible. There are some issues where immediate action may be possible. Other more complicated issues cannot be addressed except through the work programme under consideration. At any rate, the mechanism for dealing with these issues should be clear and should have a determined framework.

The success of the Ministerial Conference and the launch of a new round of negotiations depends to a large extent on an effective and fair solution to these issues.

Other important issues depend on fundamental reform to the agricultural sector, in relation to the elimination of export subsidies, improving market access, and reduction of distortions that became entrenched in this vital sector for many countries. I understand that the decisions that some countries will have to make in this regard to the liberalization of the agricultural sector are difficult ones, but

they become a necessity, especially that failure to take them will threaten the whole trading system and its credibility.

Progress on implementation and agriculture is important and will make progress on other fronts, especially the new issues, more acceptable to developing countries. Some of these include Singapore issues. Despite visible flexibility vis-a-vis these issues, their level of readiness for negotiations varies. It might be important for us on some of these such as investment and competition to continue the study in the working groups until the 5th Ministerial Conference. And it might be possible to start negotiations on others such as transparency in government procurement and trade facilitation.

Furthermore, the international trading system cannot continue to function effectively without a strong relationship between trade and environment. Whatever results from this conference in this regard, it should not affect our commitment to safeguard the environment and promote sustainable development. Dialogue on this issue should continue, even if not in a purely negotiational form. It is appropriate that this debate be coupled with building of trust and avoiding all protectionist measures and policies.

At the same time, we should have a mechanism that allows countries to fulfill their duties in combating disease and protecting public health. The human life should remain the paramount consideration, and I do hope that we agree on a separate declaration on access to medicines.

Stressing the human aspect of trade will enhance the image of the WTO especially in the least developed countries, developing Countries, and the civil society.

There are additional policies and measures that could help achieve this objective. For example the operationalization of the provisions on special and differential treatment.

Our membership today is larger than it was yesterday, and we have a historical opportunity to confront the challenges that are facing the multilateral trading system, and continue with the reform and liberalisation of international trade, an opportunity to revive the world economy, focus on the needs of least developed and developing countries and achieve their fuller participation in the WTO and the multilateral trading system.

Doha provides you today with a forum for dialogue and debate on issues that are of great importance to the whole world. It provides you with the opportunity to launch a balanced round that satisfies all and responds to their expectations and the expectation of their people.

I hope, despite your busy schedule, that you get a glimpse of the most important sights of my country, Qatar.

At the end, I wish you a pleasant stay, and successful conference.
