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SAINT LUCIA

Statement by the Honourable Calixte George Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

I bring you greetings from the micro-states of the Caribbean.

Let me extend my deepest appreciation for the warmth of the reception, the excellent arrangements and the generous hospitality of the Government and people of the United States of Mexico.

Our sympathies are extended to the families of those who perished in the 9/11 tragedy in the United States of America two years ago.

We also extend condolences to the Government and people of the Kingdom of Sweden on the sudden and tragic death of the Minister for Foreign Affairs.

This Ministerial review of the Doha Development Agenda (DDA) is to assess the progress which has been made in advancing the aims and objectives to which we jointly committed ourselves two years ago and to provide political direction on the way forward. There is little evidence of the negotiations having come up with concrete and adequate measures to advance the economic development of the less-advantaged Members although this was a stated central aim of the DDA. Nonetheless I still believe that Ministers were sincere in their intentions when they met at Doha. Should the negotiations not advance the position of the poorest and the most vulnerable but entrench the existing tendency for the stronger and more competitive trading nations to continue to grow and expand at the expense of and to the disadvantage of the weak then the talk of "development" would be nothing more than empty, cynical and misleading platitudes.

The fundamental legitimacy of the WTO is predicated on its capacity to advance the interests of all of its Members, including and in particular those of the disadvantaged or less advantaged. Its purpose should not be to help those which are already strong to secure new or expanded markets when that is at the expense of the weak and vulnerable.

Advancing the development of those countries most in need is not easy. Choices sometimes have to be made between adherence to WTO conventions, the objectives of liberalization and non-discrimination on the one hand and the attainment of trade and development goals of the less advantaged on the other. For instance, it is critically important for the weakest and most vulnerable Members, such as Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and LDCs to receive trade preferences which enable them to export successfully or specific effective safeguards to allow them to maintain and develop their domestic production capacity.

In that regard, the elaboration of Special and Differential Treatment in our context is dear to us.

We recognize that support for development comes at a cost. WTO Members must be prepared to look realistically and sincerely at the predicament of developing countries and their varying needs and to seek to find and pursue solutions - even where these solutions carry a cost or extend beyond the bounds of normal WTO conventions.

We all appreciate and must be encouraged by the general acceptance that strict adherence to the TRIPS Agreement had to be overridden in order to address the treatment needs of the millions of sufferers in poor countries of AIDS, malaria and other such major diseases. Similarly we need to muster the political will and creativity to ensure that disadvantaged nations can produce and participate fully in the global trading system. However, this cannot be so if our farmers are denied the opportunity to continue to export their traditional commodities, such as cotton, bananas and sugar, on a viable basis. In the specific case of bananas, a way must be found to preserve the trade preferences which micro-states like those of the Windward Islands and other Members of the ACP Group absolutely need in order to sell their bananas in their traditional European market. Indeed, it would be perverse if, as a consequence of inappropriate application of WTO rules, that EU enlargement next year were to create market conditions that lead to a collapse in market prices and consequently to severe long-term damage to our banana industry.

Micro-states like mine find ourselves being expected to participate in a multilateral trading system that is inherently stacked against us. The structural and capacity constraints which we face are tantamount to being permanently disabled.

Yet we are expected to participate in a system and to adhere to and abide by rules designed for those much better endowed.

It is like a one-legged man being asked to run a race with Olympic sprinters. He obviously does not stand a chance, without special measures to take account of his disability. As in the world of athletics, disabled micro-states like ours need a Special Olympics in this world trading environment.

We, as Ministers, need to show foresight and courage and the preparedness to take innovative and original decisions. There has been an unacceptable imbalance in international trade with just some countries benefiting from trade liberalization whilst others like mine have paid a disproportionate price. My assessment of the work of our negotiators is that they have not gone anywhere far enough in providing for equity in the system. Development is not just about technical assistance or passing to the Bretton Woods institutions, the task of dealing with the adverse consequences of trade liberalization and its problems. These can only genuinely be accommodated through trade rather than aid remedies.

Our interests as the smallest Members have so far not been adequately or systematically addressed in the negotiations. However, they are nonetheless valid and have as much claim and justification as those of any other Member.
