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DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

Statement by H.E. Mr Roger Lumbala
Minister of Foreign Trade

The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which I have the great honour to represent before this distinguished assembly, expresses its heartfelt thanks to the Government and people of Mexico for the warmth of the welcome extended to my delegation and to myself.

My Government's thanks also go to the Director-General of the WTO for having chosen such an ideal setting as Cancún for the current meeting.

The Fourth Ministerial Meeting of the WTO, held in Doha in 2001, resulted in the launching of a new round of multilateral trade negotiations, which are due to conclude on 1 January 2005. For the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Cancún Ministerial Conference, which marks the half-way point in this Round, is a complex exercise that is decisive for its integration into the global economy.

Being aware of the benefits which a negotiating forum on international trade could yield, the Democratic Republic of the Congo hastened to accede to the WTO in January 1997.

Since then, it has made determined efforts to implement both the multilateral agreements aimed at enhancing trade liberalization and those intended to protect consumers.

In conformity with the Uruguay Round Agreements, my country has regularly introduced tariff reductions, particularly on capital goods and imported food products, but following a long period of political instability as a result of the civil war, it is no longer the strong presence on foreign markets that it was formerly when it exported:

- Copper;
- gold;
- diamonds;
- cobalt;
- uranium;
- coffee;
- cacao;
- palm oil;
- and many other resources that had previously been a source of pride.

In accordance with the WTO's guidelines and the relevant recommendations of the International Organization for Standardization addressed to developing countries, the Democratic Republic of the Congo has organized a preshipment inspection system in order to:

- Prevent evasion of customs duties;
- give the population the best quality-price ratio;
- husband our scarce currency resources.

Our country has eased its trade regulations, particularly as regards the granting of licences and import declarations.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo has introduced an investment code that could be considered one of the most liberal and one that offers the most incentives. It is my pleasure to announce to this distinguished assembly that my country is among those which already apply the Agreement on Implementation of Article VII of the GATT as this new legislation has just been adopted by Parliament and enacted by the Head of State.

The reason we have laid particular emphasis on our action in implementing several WTO Agreements is to underline the urgent need to put the Doha programme into effect in order to take proper account of the special concerns of the least-developed countries, namely:

- Special and differential treatment;
- access to medicines;
- implementation of the Marrakesh Agreements.

For a country in a post-conflict situation such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, special and differential treatment should not only be applied with a view to market access, but primarily and above all with a view to boosting production, a *sine qua non* condition for creating wealth, without which there can be neither trade nor economic growth.

Even though there is indisputably a link between trade liberalization and economic growth, our immediate expectations concern strengthening and diversification of:

- Production capacity;
- technical assistance;
- reduction of the external debt;
- transfer of technology;
- support for the rehabilitation and development of infrastructure.

In fact, we are seeking greater collaboration between the WTO and the Bretton Woods institutions in formulating economic policies at the global level.

Regarding access to our markets by foreign products, in accordance with the Doha master plan, we demand full latitude to determine the pace and timetable for liberalization. The commitments must be adapted to the situation and to the special needs of industrial or business sectors in each country concerned.

We want to see consideration given to the impact of large tariff reductions on government revenue in countries that are highly dependent on such income.

We of course support the initiative by our fellow countries in Africa regarding the sensitive issue of cotton. If the subsidies that are dangerously distorting competition for poor countries are not eliminated, at least secure compensation mechanisms should be introduced.

As we do not only have expectations but also real reasons for satisfaction, we welcome the side-stepping of the TRIPS Agreement with the flexible concession obtained on access to essential medicines for countries with few financial resources and little production.

To conclude, the Democratic Republic of the Congo welcomes and wishes every success to Nepal and Cambodia, which have just joined the extensive WTO family.
