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Statement Circulated by Mr. Valdis Birkavs,
Minister for Foreign Affairs
(As An Observer)

Allow me on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Latvia to express my great pleasure and high appreciation for having this opportunity to address the Second Ministerial Conference of the WTO held in its head-quarters in Geneva, Switzerland.

The Republic of Latvia, currently having an observer status in the WTO, since 1993 has been devoted to the process of accession to the GATT at that time, and since the establishment of the WTO in 1995 we have striven to join this multilateral trading system of an inevitably and steadily growing importance.

The Government of the Republic of Latvia attaches the greatest importance to the completion of our accession negotiations and obtaining a status of full membership which we consider as a logical way of progressive and effective integration of the Republic of Latvia into the global trading system. We believe that the universal nature of the WTO ensures our participation in an open, fair, rule-based and dynamic trade system, leading to the growth of the world trade and investment thus creating possibilities for new jobs.

Since regaining of our independence, the Government of the Republic of Latvia has launched a profound and comprehensive reform package in order to establish an economic system fully based on the principles of market economy. Our trade policy objectives are based on a liberal trade regime for trade in goods and services, and now when Latvia has entered into the final stage of our accession to the WTO, the high quality of our market access commitments has been recognized by most of the WTO Members.

In our accession negotiations to the WTO, the Republic of Latvia has committed itself to the implementation of all the WTO obligations upon accession without a recourse to any transitional period. Moreover, we have taken certain significant WTO plus commitments. Although not a WTO Member yet, we highly respect WTO rules and regulations, and their absolute majority already now constitutes an integral part of our legislation. The consequences arising from the accession process and a potential membership in the WTO have very positively influenced and even accelerated the whole reform process in Latvia.

Concerning market access for trade in goods the Republic of Latvia has met all the requests on all tariff lines which were of WTO Members interest. As regards Latvia's commitments for trade in services, the sectoral coverage and quality of our commitments have been recognized by all the WTO

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Members although negotiations have not been completed yet in the audio-visual services sector recognized as very sensitive for the most of WTO Members.

The Government of the Republic of Latvia remains convinced that the current results of our bilateral market access negotiations for both goods and services represent genuinely open market access situation and create a very good precedent for the accessions to follow.

We believe that the Ministerial Conference and the next rounds of trade liberalization negotiations to follow are the best forum for furthering progressive development of the global trading system and the best place for discussions that would increase Members' understanding of each other and would provide for a prompt review of their own policies.

In conclusion let me confirm once more the belief of our Government, that every country to accede to the WTO will contribute to the global and universal nature of this Organization, by expanding the acceptance of the WTO rules and providing extensive market access commitments.
