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Statement Circulated by Mrs. Anneke Van Dok-Van Weele,
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The Netherlands sees the second Ministerial Conference of the WTO and the memorable celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the multilateral trading system as a good occasion for all parties to confirm their attachment to the process of worldwide trade liberalization. We should strive for the elimination of barriers to the free flow of goods and services to the maximum possible extent, within the framework of a rules-based multilateral system that offers fair and predictable conditions to all. Under such conditions, international trade will contribute to an optimal international division of labour and as a result to sustainable development and prosperity for all participants.

The WTO Agreements adopted at Marrakesh have strongly contributed to the strengthening of the multilateral trading system by a substantial further opening of our markets and by clarifying and strengthening the relevant disciplines. A crucial element in this context was the establishment of the WTO's dispute settlement mechanism. Full implementation of the agreements, including loyal implementation of panel rulings and of the findings of the Appellate Body, is essential for the credibility of the multilateral trading system and for safeguarding the benefits resulting from it.

The WTO's Ministerial Conferences are of great importance for maintaining the momentum for the process of trade liberalization. In the present Conference we should strike a balance between on the one hand full implementation of the existing agreements and on the other hand looking ahead to our future work. This future work implies the agreed working programme, but at the same time we should continue studying and discussing new issues that deserve the WTO's attention and see if additional WTO agreements may be needed. The Netherlands favours the idea of launching a new round of comprehensive multilateral trade negotiations from 2000, which should lead to results within a reasonable period of time in a package that is beneficial for all parties.

However beneficial the process of trade liberalization may be, special efforts from all parties concerned are needed to ensure continuation of this process. In this context, I wish to mention two aspects more specifically: on the one hand the importance of full integration of developing countries in the multilateral trading system; on the other hand the need for a comprehensive dialogue with the general public and greater transparency in the WTO, so that the public gets a better understanding of the benefits of trade liberalization and has the opportunity to express its interests and concerns. For the Netherlands Government, the full integration of developing countries in the world trading system is of utmost importance. We should not impose our ideas and solutions on our economically less advanced partners, but should maintain a continuous dialogue in order to build consensus for further steps towards full trade liberalization. In this context, I stress the importance of a comprehensive new round resulting in a balanced package, which also reflects the interests of developing countries. More

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specifically, we should continue and intensify our efforts aimed at full integration of the least-developed countries, along the lines agreed at the Ministerial Conference of Singapore and the High Level Meeting on Integrated Initiatives for the Least-Developed Countries' Trade Development of October 1997. I welcome the Director-General's Report on this issue. This, however, should not be the end of the process, but the starting-point for a further intensification of our efforts to enhance market access for these countries and to assist them in reaping the full benefits of international trade.

It is of equal importance, that both the WTO and national governments maintain a comprehensive dialogue with the general public and with non-governmental organizations in order to explain the benefits of the multilateral trading system. WTO Members, primarily at home, but also collectively in the WTO, should listen to the questions or concerns the public may have and be fully aware of the interests of the consumers, who, in the end, are the beneficiaries of the WTO process. We should absolutely avoid a situation in which the WTO is perceived as a fortress of single-minded trade bureaucrats, who strike deals in secrecy without having an eye for the interests of the general public. Greater transparency of WTO's decision making will contribute to this objective.

More specifically, the WTO and other relevant fora should address the concerns of consumers in the field of the protection of the environment and of human, animal and plant health, labour rights, etc. As regards trade and environment, it is important that the work in the CTE will soon lead to tangible results in areas like the relationship between WTO rules and Multilateral Environmental Agreements and labelling. As regards other consumer concerns, some of them relate directly to trade policy, others only indirectly or remotely.

A wide variety of concerns will have to be addressed through a variety of policies, not necessarily always within the framework of the WTO. However, we will have to face that we have a common interest in addressing seriously the legitimate concerns of consumers and constructively seeking a common approach to accommodate them. At the very least governments and the WTO should ensure that consumers can make informed choices for themselves through certification, labelling, etc.

Whatever we do, we cannot and should not pretend that trade policy can be conducted in isolation from other issues in our societies. If we fail here, we might seriously undermine the support for the multilateral trading system and would jeopardize the further process of trade liberalization.

I am fully confident that, if we succeed in addressing the challenges mentioned above, we will be able to strengthen the foundations of the WTO and maintain the momentum for an ongoing multilateral process of trade liberalization for the benefit of all.
