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Statement Circulated by H.E. Mr. Ibrahim Koussou,
Minister of Trade and Industry of Niger

I should like first of all to express to you, Mr. Chairman, and through you to the people of Switzerland, my deep gratitude for the warm and hospitable welcome given to our delegation. I also wish to address my thanks to Mr. Renato Ruggiero, Director-General of the WTO, and all his staff for the efforts they have made in organizing and running this Conference.

After Singapore, it is now Geneva's turn to host the Ministerial Conference of our common organization, the World Trade Organization (WTO). The holding of this second Conference coincides most fortunately with the 50th Anniversary of the multilateral trading system which we are going to celebrate in this magnificent city, headquarters of several of our international organizations.

The history of the multilateral trading system has been marked, as you know, by major events at the economic, social and political levels. They have included:

- The formation of large economic groupings in all regions of the world;
- major economic and political changes in central and eastern Europe and in the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics;
- the launching and consolidation of the democratic process in our countries; and, lastly,
- the completion of the Uruguay Round negotiations by the establishment of the World Trade Organization, having for its background the liberalization and globalization of trade and the economy.

The opportunity is thus given to us to look back over the evolution of the multilateral trading system, to assess its contribution and evaluate its performance with a view to defining new approaches which would take better account of the interests of our countries, and particularly those of the least-developed countries, in the future multilateral trade negotiations.

Clearly, the evaluation of the implementation of the Singapore Ministerial Declaration and of the Plan of Action for the Least-Developed Countries constitutes an opportunity for gauging not only the international community's commitment to furnishing technical assistance to our States, but also the degree of incorporation of the developing countries into the new multilateral trading system.

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First of all, my country, like the other least-developed countries, welcomed the holding at Geneva on 27 and 28 October 1997 of the High Level Meeting on integrated initiatives for least-developed countries' trade development. In that regard, my Government attaches particular importance to the implementation and continuation by the developed countries and the international community of the commitments entered into at the end of that meeting, particularly the granting of the necessary technical assistance for the development of the trade and investment capacities of our countries.

What is more, as a least-developed country of the Sahel and a net-importer of food, my country requests the concrete implementation of the Decision on Measures Concerning the Possible Negative Effects of the Reform Programme on Least-Developed Countries and its extension to the benefit of other developing countries facing problems of food insecurity.

Being well aware of what is at stake and of the obligations imposed by the Uruguay Round Agreements, the Government of Niger has embarked upon a vast programme of economic and legal reforms to adapt its economy to the current context of globalization and liberalization.

It is in that perspective that a national policy and framework programme for the promotion of the private sector have been adopted by my Government. Before the end of 1998, a specific round-table meeting on the private sector will be organized to make a thorough study of all the aspects of our policy for the promotion of the private sector, particularly the improvement of the business environment and measures in favour of investment.

However, carrying out these reforms implies costs which the low level of economic development of my country does not permit us to bear. That is why, in the future integrated programme, an extra effort should be made by the WTO and the international community to apply effectively the special and differentiated treatment in favour of our countries so as to support their efforts to adapt and to win a place for themselves in the new multilateral trading system.

We are convinced that this Conference will not fail to adopt bold recommendations to preserve the interests of developing countries and their peoples. Wishing all of us every success in our work, I thank you for your kind attention.
