

**ADDRESS BY H.E. MINISTER RACHID MOHAMED RACHID
MINISTER OF TRADE & INDUSTRY OF THE ARAB REPUBLIC OF EGYPT
TO THE AFRICAN GROUP MINISTERIAL MEETING**

**THE SEVENTH WTO MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE
(Geneva, 30 November to 2 December 2009)**

**Honorable Ministers;
Distinguished Ambassadors and delegates;**

At the outset, I would like to convey our deep appreciation to the African Union for hosting this meeting.

It is a great honour for me to meet you again after the informal meeting we held in Cairo last month.

As we meet today, we look ahead to the launch of the 7th Session of the WTO Ministerial Conference. This session is being held while the global economy is still facing the impacts of an unprecedented crisis. Some signals for a recovery have been registered. Yet this recovery is fragile, uneven and many difficulties still lie ahead.

As for our continent, the African Development Bank estimates that the losses in export revenues will reach \$251 billion in 2009 and \$277 billion in 2010. These losses are most likely to be increased if the protectionist trends which started during the crisis continued to restrict and threat the trade liberalization.

Today we have another opportunity to confirm and re-emphasize that Africa's trade concerns are vital for any coming agreement aiming at concluding the Doha round by 2010 as proposed.

Honorable Ministers;

We have met in Cairo during the Informal Meeting of the African Ministers of Trade that Egypt hosted from the 27th to the 29th of October 2009. This meeting was opportune for preparing ourselves to the 7th Session of the WTO Ministerial Conference, exchanging views as for the current situation of the global economy, taking stock of the progress made in the DDA negotiations and assessing our needs and positions.

We agreed that the most effective means of sustaining and securing our recovery, as well as dealing with protectionist tendencies is a successful conclusion of the Doha Development Round, with the developmental component at its core, in 2010.

We noted that the high-level political commitment to concluding the Doha Round in 2010 have not yet been translated into tangible progress in the negotiations. Not only are we disappointed by the lack of progress in the negotiations, we are now even facing the risk of backsliding.

In addition, we have flagged, on many occasions, our concerns regarding the increasing trend of reliance on small group consultations in negotiations. All of this raises doubts about the possibility to conclude the current Doha round by 2010, and about the credibility of multilateralism, transparency and the inclusiveness of the DDA negotiations.

We agreed to come to Geneva with the Cairo Communiqué to deliver our message to the Ministerial Conference. We have underscored the strong voice of Africa at the 7th WTO Ministerial is indispensable to flag out our concerns on the state of play of the DDA negotiations. In addition, we have

to actively participate and contribute to the evaluation and review of the work of the WTO from a developmental and African perspective.

Our message is that drawing roadmaps will not be enough for the conclusion of the round; the most importantly is that we all work together and to be ready to take difficult, even hard, decisions.

We are here to urge our partners to exercise leadership and all possible flexibility to accelerate the work and close the gaps. This works should build on the progress achieved to-date, including with regard to modalities.

We are here to express our concerns that no significant progress has been achieved in key issues of interest to Africa. The African group needs to stress on the issues which are of high priority to us, like a satisfactory early harvest solution for cotton and LDCs, the operationalization of Aid for Trade, the bananas issue and the presence of the development component in all negotiating tracks.

Since our meeting in Cairo, we have worked hard to fulfill what we agreed upon with respect to the maintenance and enhancement of the coordination between the African Group and other developing country groupings, as well as the development and implementation of a media strategy to ensure that Africa's interests and concerns are strongly voiced.

In this respect, we have conducted several meetings with other groupings and actors on yesterday, namely with the G20. After this meeting, we will also meet with other developing countries groups in Room W at the WTO.

The shared understanding among all developing country groupings is that we should deliver a strong and unified message on the importance of

the translation of political signals and commitments to real negotiating positions which lead to a successful, fair and early conclusion of the DDA.

This unified message should also voice our deep concerns regarding the lack of inclusiveness and transparency of the negotiating process and our demand for full participation of all developing country groupings in all areas of the negotiations. We also need to underscore the necessity of adhering to the agreed principles of negotiations and caution against any form of backsliding, re-interpretation or re-opening of the mandate.

Thus, our meeting with other developing countries' groups will be indispensable for expressing the solidarity and consensus among all developing country groupings and to coordinate the ways to disseminate our message other than by means of the "Declaration of Developing Countries".

We need to work together with all developing country groupings to build up a public opinion that empathizes and supports our demands and puts pressure on the concerned developed countries. We should bring about the wide understanding that we are currently, due to mere political concerns of some rich countries, losing the opportunity to get millions of people out of poverty and to boost the economic and social development in poor countries.

Honorable Ministers;

We are committed to a strengthened, rule-based, non-discriminatory multilateral trading system which is fair and equitable. The central theme of the negotiations should be to focus on all-round development capable of eradicating poverty. Economic integration cannot advance if the interests of the poor are left behind.

Let me conclude by saying that this Ministerial Conference should steer WTO in the direction of greater equity and balance and to set ourselves a positive, achievable and trade-related agenda, which will usher in greater prosperity for all of us. Only if our approach is development-centric, can our work programmes act as a facilitator for accelerated growth of developing countries. Therefore, every step we take in the direction of trade liberalization should ensure rewards in the form of larger markets and greater trade-flows for all – let the welfare gains benefit everyone in the planet and not a mere fortunate few.

This is my message to you, Excellencies, and I am looking forward to your comments and ideas which will further enhance the positioning of Africa's concerns.

Thank you.

The floor is open for comments and ideas....