

Seventh WTO Ministerial Conference

30 November – 2 December

"Review of WTO activities, including the Doha Work Programme"

(Working Session 1)

Statement by H.E. Minister Rachid Mohamed Rachid

Minister of Trade & Industry of the Arab Republic of Egypt

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We meet here today in Geneva at a critical time, not only for the multilateral trading system but for the global governance system as a whole. The world has recently been faced with significant challenges, such as the food, fuel, economic and financial crises, the rising waves of protectionism, and the climate change issues. More than other countries, developing countries who only dispose of limited capacities and tools to cope with these challenges, have been severely hit and negatively impacted thereby.

Yet, as demonstrated by several studies, an enhanced pro-development multilateral trading system that ensures openness, predictability and stability worldwide can be instrumental for

fostering the economies of developing countries through job creation and poverty alleviation.

Therefore, it is crucial for the WTO to live up to this responsibility. Hence, we need to find ways to ensure the optimum performance of the WTO. The most important performance criterion for the WTO is its success in achieving development for its members, particularly for the poorer ones among them, whose main resort for overcoming the overwhelming world challenges and achieving development for their people is an enhanced multilateral trading system.

Allow me to elaborate on the African Groups views on the enhancement of the WTO system:

First of all, a fair and successful conclusion of the DDA which has development at its core is the main opportunity to prove our determination to strengthen the multilateral trading system. We are pleased with the fact that we already have 80% of the work done (as estimated by the Director General) and with the several high level political signals & commitments to conclude the Doha round by 2010.

However, although our target is within reach, those political signals have –unfortunately- not yet been translated into flexible negotiating positions which would enable us to attain this target. Paradoxically, at a time when we should be determinately and swiftly heading towards the finish line, we are risking detraction from our target as a result of attempts of backsliding in the negotiations.

Thus, we need to come out of this meeting with a strong and real commitment to the successful and fair conclusion of the Doha Development Round. This commitment has to be immediately translated and concretized into more flexible negotiating positions which build on the progress that has been achieved so far.

In this regard, we need to refrain from any attempts to reinterpret or change the existing mandates or to deviate from agreed principles in the negotiations. We should also be cautious against any form of selective re-sequencing of issues or reopening of the stabilized parts of modalities.

Moreover, we need to ensure that that the negotiating process remains multilateral and fully transparent, with a bottom-up approach. I would like to reiterate that informal bilateral and

plurilateral consultations, though probably useful in enhancing mutual understanding, cannot be a substitute for a genuine multilateral process, nor should they affect the consensus reached within the multilateral context. Also, the negotiating process must ensure the full participation of all developing members, particularly the African ones, in all the negotiating processes based on balanced and consensually agreed agendas.

In this context, I would like to reaffirm that issues of importance to the African Group should be adequately addressed and not sidelined nor relegated. With respect to regional trade arrangements, efforts need to be intensified towards appropriately amending Article 24 of GATT 1994. This amendment should be of a view to allowing necessary Special and Differential Treatment, less than full reciprocity principle and explicit flexibilities, that are consistent with the asymmetry required to make the trade arrangements development oriented for Africa.

We need to achieve satisfactory and early harvest based solutions for the issues of cotton and duty-free and quota free access for LDCs. Moreover, we have to ensure full operationalization and support for Aid for Trade given its importance in addressing the

supply side capacity and trade related infrastructure, particularly for African countries. A waiver decision on preferential and more favourable treatment to services and services suppliers of LDCs also needs to be issued.

These are only some of the issues of importance to Africa. We would like to emphasize that a tangible development content must be evident within each negotiating track, and in the overall DDA outcome.

As stated before, the successful conclusion of the DDA should be prioritized in order to strengthen the multilateral trading system. In addition, I would like to share with you some other possible ideas for enhancing the performance of the WTO:

- Accession to the WTO:

Many Developing and Least Developed countries have been confronted with a complex and prolonged process of accession to the WTO. Given the importance of their integration into the multilateral trading system, both for the development of the countries concerned, as well as for the multilateral trading system as a whole which could achieve the

enforcement of its rules at a wider scale, we need to explore ways for facilitating and accelerating the accession process.

Thus, it is important that the General Council expedites action on the reviewing process and recommends ways to undertake the reforms needed to clarify the relevant provisions for accession, and to improve systemic transparency through periodical progress reports on accession. Furthermore, we should ensure that accessions focus primarily on the trade policies and practices of acceding countries rather than on other extraneous considerations.

- Climate Change:

Furthermore, as I have mentioned before, our meeting coincides with multiple events that have impacted and will continue to impact the world economy. In view of the upcoming UN Climate Change Conference to be held in Copenhagen from 7 to 18 December, I would like to take this opportunity to recall that developing countries' exports should not be restricted on the grounds of the protection of the climate. While we maintain the view that the main forum for

discussing the climate issues is the United Nations, we strongly emphasize that measures or decisions taken to protect the climate should be in line and consistent with the rules of the WTO.

- Process to review the WTO's functioning, efficiency and transparency**

In addition, as proposed by some members, an appropriate deliberative process to review the WTO's functioning, efficiency and transparency and to consider possible improvements should be established.

These were some ideas for possible means of strengthening the work of the WTO. Yet, I believe that there are many other ideas to come and to be discussed.

Finally, I would like to stress once more that our priority for the coming few months should be ensuring the successful conclusion of the Doha Round. Let's reap the fruits of our eight years of work!

Thank you