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Statement by the Honourable Kofi Konadu Apraku, MP Minister of Trade and Industry

First of all, we would like to express our deep appreciation to the Government and people of Qatar for their hospitality and the excellent facilities they have put at our disposal.

In paragraph 8 of the Declaration we adopted at our Second Conference in Geneva in May 1998, we undertook, among others, to evaluate the implementation of the Uruguay Round Agreements at our Third Conference.

Unfortunately, the collapse of the Conference did not allow such an evaluation. It is therefore logical that as we stand on the threshold of another negotiation, we undertake that evaluation. In this respect, the Director-General has covered some ground in his "Overview of Developments in the International Trading Environment" (WT/MIN(O1)/2 dated 22 October 2001).

Some of us have repeatedly said that we have problems with the implementation of the Uruguay Round (UR) Agreements which need resolution. And we have also been labouring to fulfil our obligations whilst because of our weak capacity and supply-side constraints, we have been unable to enjoy the benefits of the trading system.

Whilst the primary responsibility for addressing these problems is ours, and as we make strenuous efforts to address them, we expect the WTO to address frontally those within its ambit.

In this connection, we note with appreciation the untiring efforts of the Director-General, together with the Membership, to resolve some of our problems as part of the confidence-building measures to shore up the image of the Organization following the Seattle fiasco.

Effective technical assistance in capacity building and the resolution of the implementation problems are, in our view, the two most important things which would go a long way to addressing the problems of the developing countries with inadequate capacity.

There is, therefore, a need for a strong collaboration in the WTO's capacity-building activities with institutions such as the IMF, the World Bank, the ITC and the regional development banks, under the coherence mandate. In this respect we welcome the initiatives that the Director-General is taking in the area of technical cooperation. However, if these initiatives are to bear fruits, there should be a fresh look at the pre-Seattle proposal to increase the funding of technical assistance from the regular budget which seems to have been given scant attention so far. Without increased funding, no matter how brilliant any initiatives are, they will produce no results.

This brings me to another plank in the development agenda - the faithful implementation of the Special and Differential (S&D) provisions. I would simply say that the work programme on S&D treatment that the Conference is about to adopt must be accomplished expeditiously to pave way

for the effective implementation of the S&D provisions to ensure that developing countries enjoy their benefits in concrete terms.

Let me turn to the work programme that we shall be adopting. It has now almost become a platitude to say that most African Members of the WTO lack the capacity to assume more obligations. As I said at the beginning, currently we are finding it extremely difficult to fulfil our obligations arising out of the UR Agreements.

It is therefore logical and practical rather than tactical that we advocate for a slimmer work programme which would not overtax our limited capacity. We need to avoid overloading the work programme especially with issues of doubtful relevance to the WTO's mandate and adopt a manageable agenda. Our lack of conviction for a broad and expanded agenda is grounded in our experience with the implementation of the results of the Uruguay Round. The optimistic assessments and the promise of improvement in market access for developing countries following the round have been belied by the reality.

There is therefore an urgent need to address these problems in order to make the WTO really development-oriented. Action we expect include the translation of the S&D provisions into explicit legally binding obligations; review of the Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures to take into account specific problems and requirements of African countries; measures for the realization of technology transfer objectives envisaged in the TRIPS Agreement and other relevant provisions of the WTO Agreements; and the effective implementation of Article IV of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) for building services capacity, access to technology and distribution channels.

It is also important, in the light of current developments, for WTO Members to affirm the understanding that no provision of the TRIPS Agreement should stand in the way of Members' right to promote public health.

There is a need to remove tariff peaks and escalation, and relax the application of stringent sanitary and phytosanitary measures restricting, in particular, African exports. The implementation of the Agreement on Agriculture should be geared towards meeting core development concerns, such as food security, poverty reduction, rural development, and the implementation of special measures in favour of the least-developed countries (LDCs) and the net food-importing developing countries (NFDICs). These measures, supported and supplemented by specific capacity-building programmes to assist us to diversify our exports and improve our competitiveness, will go a long way towards integrating us into the trading system.

Unless we are assisted to be able to increase our export capacity, pressure on us to further open our markets will lead to a situation where there will be no resources available to us to import, even though our markets remain open. For, it is our export earnings which sustain our import capacity. Support for removing supply-side constraints is therefore imperative.

Now let me touch on the WTO decision-making process which will be crucial as we enter the negotiations. There is an urgent need for an innovative way of decision-making in the Organization to make it more democratic. For this reason, we would like to note with appreciation the innovative manner in which the immediate past Chairman of the General Council and the current Chairman have conducted consultations. Their consultations have been open, transparent, and inclusive. It is regrettable, however, that the resulting document has not reflected the concerns and issues expressed during the consultations by African countries.

Above all, it is not enough to leave the process to the benevolence and style of successive Chairmen of the General Council. The work that the General Council began on decision-making

should be pursued to its logical conclusion by the adoption of guidelines for decision-making in parallel with the implementation of the work programme that the Conference will adopt.

The challenging tasks of the WTO, as it prepares to embark on new negotiations, in our view, is to pursue a development-oriented agenda that would integrate developing countries, which form a vast majority of its Membership, into the multilateral trading system.
