

**High-Level Meeting on Integrated Initiatives for
Least-Developed Countries' Trade Development**

**DECLARATION OF THE AFRICAN COUNTRIES ON THE HIGH-LEVEL MEETING
ON INTEGRATED INITIATIVES FOR LEAST-DEVELOPED COUNTRIES'
TRADE DEVELOPMENT**

**Declaration of the African Countries on the
High-Level Meeting on Integrated Initiatives for Least-Developed
Countries' Trade and Development**

We the representatives of African Countries, meeting in Geneva on the occasion of the High-Level Meeting on Integrated Initiatives for Least-Developed Countries' Trade and Development,

Having assessed the various initiatives aimed at accelerating the development process in our countries and enhancing our integration into the new global economic system,

Welcome the High-Level Meeting (HLM) on Integrated Initiatives for Least-Developed Countries' Trade and Development as a forum for formulating a coherent and integrated international approach and framework for supporting the trade-related activities of the LDCs with a view to assisting our countries to become viable trading nations.

In our collective desire to ensure that the HLM is successful in reaching these objectives with the required impact in advancing the overall capacity of our countries to respond to the new opportunities offered by the international trading system, we declare the following:

1. We view the issues that the HLM must address as falling into two distant categories, namely, domestic supply response and market access.

Domestic Supply Response

2. Notwithstanding the various programmes and initiatives of the international community in support of our growth and development, we remain constrained by weak supply capabilities which limit our ability to benefit from globalisation and liberalisation.
3. We are convinced that measures to enhance access to our major export markets must be complemented by a new determination to deal comprehensively with country-specific and sub-regional constraints on our supply response in the international trading system.
4. As a first step, we are ourselves committed to expand and deepen our reform endeavours in such areas as macroeconomic and sectoral policies, human resource development, regional cooperation, economic integration, governance and institutional capacity building. This is in line with the commitments we have made within the framework of economic reform programmes and international and regional initiatives such as the *Paris Programme of Action* and the *Abuja Treaty*.

5. For our policy reforms to address these constraints there is need to tackle endemic problems of infrastructure, relating especially to power, telecommunications, modern information systems, road, rail, air, and maritime transport facilities. We note, in particular, that high cost and inefficient transport systems impose an "additional tariff", estimated at over 20 per cent, on our exports and severe limitations on our ability to compete which discourage private investment.
6. Some of these problems have to be resolved within a sub-regional/regional context. For example, the high transit costs of the land-locked countries among the LDCs have to be addressed within the framework of regional or sub-regional economic integration. We therefore urge that the regional dimension of capacity building for trade and development should not be ignored.
7. We welcome the focus of the HLM on country-specific needs in order to facilitate a serious and in-depth assessment of the problems and the formulation of an integrated response by the agencies concerned. However, for those LDCs not in a position to show case their needs at the HLM, there must be clear commitment to an appropriate process for the articulation of the country-specific needs of all LDCs.
8. We wish to underscore the importance of effective inter-agency coordination within the integrated approach for supporting the trade-related activities of the LDCs. We therefore call upon the major agencies and our development partners to establish a *modus operandi* amongst them for the practical application of the integrated approach.
9. Beyond our capacity building needs for integration into the international trading system, there is also the question of our meaningful participation in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) system and, in particular, the forthcoming negotiations on the new issues and the built-in agenda.
10. We believe that the development dimension should not be ignored in these negotiations. We therefore seize the occasion of the HLM to draw attention to the need of the LDCs for technical assistance to enable us to articulate a development perspective in prospective multilateral trade negotiations.

Market Access

11. We recognise that the average level of tariff protection in our major markets is relatively low. Nonetheless, there are serious barriers to entry in certain sectors of particular interest to us including agriculture, textiles, clothing, and fish products.

12. In our major markets for these products, we face difficulties arising from tariff peaks, preference erosion and tariff escalation. Moreover, we are likely to face threats to market access from two major areas. First there is the potential for the abuse of anti-dumping, countervailing, sanitary and phytosanitary measures. Second, there is the possibility of our countries being marginalised by the formation of regional trading blocs.
13. We have observed that there is as yet no visible action in implementing several measures accorded to the LDCs in the various Agreements of the Final Act of the Uruguay Round.
14. We believe that in such matters as trade preferential arrangements under the Lome Convention or further trade liberalisation in favour of products of export interest to LDCs, there is need for a positive attitude from both developing and industrialised countries towards our countries.
15. In this regard, we wish to draw attention to the relevant provisions in the Marrakech Decision on Measures in Favour of Least Developed Countries. We note further the reaffirmation of these provisions in the Singapore Ministerial Declaration and, in particular, the provision urging developed countries to utilise the Agreement on Textiles and Clothing to increase market access for small suppliers, new entrants and LDCs.
16. We welcome the proposal by the Director-General of the WTO for duty free treatment of products of export interest to the LDCs. We urge the full implementation of this proposal.
17. With regard to the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP), we call for special treatment for LDCs through the granting of comprehensive product coverage of all dutiable products including agricultural and resource-based products, tropical industrial products, leather, footwear, textile and clothing products.
18. We further call for multilaterally agreed criteria for the country\product graduation from the GSP and the relaxation of existing rules of origin to include full and global cumulation and flexible administration of documentary and shipment requirements. We believe that these measures will enhance the stability and predictability of GSP schemes that could provide conditions for building a sustainable export base.
19. In regard to our own progress on market liberalisation as part of the overall effort at enhancing the incentive framework to build export capacity, we acknowledge that we have been far more successful in reducing quantitative restrictions than tariffs which are still in the 25-30 per cent range.

20. On this matter of tariff reduction, we invite the HLM to be seized of the dilemma we face in regard to the impact on budget revenues, increased fiscal deficits, macro-economic instability and our debt service burden with a view to helping us find a way out of this predicament.

Conclusion

21. Finally, we regard the HLM not merely as a one-off event or simply the occasion for launching a package of integrated measures to assist the building-up of trade capacity in our countries. Rather, we view the HLM as part of a new pro-active international effort to accelerate the integration of the LDCs into the global trading system.
22. To this extent, we believe that it will be necessary for the HLM to be followed by an appropriate programme of activities. These will bring together the major agencies, donors, interested governments and the LDCs themselves to maintain the current momentum as well as to review, monitor, follow-up and take forward the proposals emanating from the HLM.