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Committee on Trade and Environment

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Statement by the Director-General of the WTO, Mr. Mike Moore

1. It is a pleasure to be here today for the Committee on Trade and Environment's Information Session on Multilateral Environment Agreements (MEAs). I believe this is the first time a director-general has attended a CTE meeting and I hope it will not be the last.
2. I am particularly glad that Klaus Töpfer, the Executive Director of UNEP, is here with us this morning, together with representatives from several MEA Secretariats.
3. When Ministers agreed in Marrakesh in 1994 that a Committee on Trade and Environment should be established, they recalled, among other things, the Rio Declaration, Agenda 21 and the Preamble to the Agreement establishing the WTO itself. Thus, the WTO, UNEP and MEAs share common objectives.
4. The CTE has a broad and complex analytical work programme. The Singapore Ministerial Conference noted that the breadth and complexity of the issues showed that further work was needed on all items of its agenda. I think that these MEA information sessions, which have become a regular feature of the CTE, have served to enhance Members' understanding of the relationship between the trade and environment agendas, particularly with respect to MEAs, as well as MEAs' grasp of the multilateral trading system. Building on these sessions will help us to maximise synergies and reduce potential tensions.
5. In the GATT, the word "environment" was seldom heard in trade circles (except when they talked about "the trading environment"). The phrase "sustainable development" was in nobody's vocabulary until it was coined by the Brundtland Commission in 1987, yet it served as the basis for the progress made at the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio in 1992.
6. I think the placing of trade and environment issues on the WTO's agenda and the introduction of sustainable development as one of the WTO's aims has helped to raise awareness internationally and nationally of the need to maximise synergies between trade and environment policies. That awareness raising owes much to the work of the CTE over the last five years.
7. There has also been a change of mentality at the WTO. Discussions have served to dispel important misconceptions and prejudices that used to prevail. It is now conventional wisdom that multilateral cooperative solutions based on international cooperation and consensus is the best and most effective way for governments to tackle environmental concerns. In this sense, the WTO and MEAs are representatives of efforts of the international community to pursue shared goals, and due respect must be given to both. Our special study on trade and the environment, published a year ago, was emblematic of the WTO's new approach.

8. Through a mutual exchange of information on trade and environment issues, and increasing awareness of the processes in MEAs and vice versa, the information sessions have served as a confidence-building mechanism. They have also played a role in fostering increased coordination between trade and environment officials at the national as well as international levels.

9. I have looked over the many background papers that have been prepared by the MEA Secretariats and I must admit that one acronym, M.I.K.E., did catch my attention. I understand from the CITES Secretariat's paper that it stands for the programme on "Monitoring of the Illegal Killing of Elephants." I am glad that my name is associated with environmental conservation!

10. In discussing the relationship between the WTO and MEAs, in general, it is important to bear in mind that there are inherent difficulties in adapting a "one-size-fits-all" approach. For this reason, understanding and identifying areas of complementarity between specific MEAs and the WTO represents a way to maximize synergies and to minimize areas of potential tension. In this respect, I welcome the initiative taken by UNEP and the MEA secretariats to broaden the debate to explore the numerous available synergies. This practical approach, focusing on concrete examples, can provide the basis for a more pro-active engagement with the trade community.

11. Throughout the discussions, I think we must remain vigilant to the threat of protectionism; this is in the interest of the environmental community itself, because if environmental measures are seen, or believed, to be hidden "green protectionism", it would set back your cause and ours.

12. We must also remain sensitive to the situation and needs of developing countries. Forging a common approach to trade and environment between all WTO Members is essential. Progress on ensuring that trade and environment policies are put in place in a manner that is mutually supportive cannot be made without the consent and support of developing countries.

13. WTO work will be helped by progress elsewhere on the multilateral environmental policy agenda. The UNEP meeting yesterday and the MEA information sessions, such as the one today, are important steps forward in this respect. Enhanced co-ordination will greatly facilitate the smooth evolution of the trade and environmental regimes.
