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## GUYANA

### Statement by the Honourable Clement J. Rohee, MP Minister of Foreign Affairs

Guyana comes to Seattle with a single objective in mind – to bring about a positive and balanced outcome at this Third WTO Ministerial Meeting. This is what we Ministers must seek to achieve during the next few days – a balanced, fair and sustainable trade agenda into the next century. Nothing less will work and we should not seek anything less. We ought to be motivated by the difficult and contentious preparatory process that engaged our representatives in Geneva.

We should not, therefore, merely try to make compromises. More importantly, our decisions must point to pragmatic solutions and realistic expectations. We should resolve that the WTO regime had first to be **reviewed, repaired and reformed** before it could be enlarged and that **development** must be at the centre of this process. To ensure this, we must focus on the following key and critical issues before us:

First, **implementation concerns**. These concerns are real and are based on the experience of the last five years following the establishment of the World Trade Organization.

The international trading system is central to the ongoing process of economic reforms in our countries. As such, the functioning of the WTO must be responsive and sensitive to the development needs of all its Members, in particular to the effective and beneficial integration of the smaller and less dynamic economies. The system must serve us, not demand from us. Not only is a review of the Uruguay Round Agreements necessary, but critical reforms cannot be avoided. Built-in imbalances have emerged against developing countries and these must be corrected unconditionally and as a matter of highest priority.

Second, the issue of **special and differential treatment**. The provisions for special and differential treatment must be emphasized in recognition of the structural disadvantages faced by many developing countries by virtue of their comparatively low level of development and inadequate access to technology and knowledge-based capital.

Many small developing countries, like Guyana, have undertaken comprehensive structural adjustment programmes in collaboration with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. Needless to say, in most cases the commencement of these structural adjustments preceded the WTO as well as the conclusion of the Uruguay Round.

For Guyana, it has not been an easy process to mobilize the national political support for the structural adjustment and liberalization programme. Besides, the adjustment process brought with it, immediately, certain debilitating consequences for the weaker sections of the population including the productive sectors.

The liberalization and globalization process must ensure sustainability and stability in the development of the smaller economies. Dislocations must be minimized to the very least. In the WTO context, therefore, future special and differential treatment should be based on specific development criteria instead of arbitrarily defined transition periods.

Third, a **new negotiating round**. The principal guide for any new round of negotiations is the need to make right existing imbalances in the international trading system. This should not become something developing countries are expected to "pay" for. Otherwise we will simply perpetrate growing inequity and widening disparities and poverty in our developing country Members.

In the area of agriculture we demand better market access that benefits all Members, particularly developing countries. In countries such as mine, the agricultural sector is a way of life. For the developing countries the big challenge is to ensure that the international regulatory framework governing agricultural trade will contribute to the agricultural development and food security.

Any new negotiations must address the elimination of tariff peaks and tariff escalation and should introduce further disciplines to prevent the abuse of measures such as anti-dumping, countervailing duties and safeguard actions, sanitary and phytosanitary regulations and technical barriers to trade.

Fourth, the matter of **core labour standards**. We have said it before and we wish to emphasize it again. We believe in the right of workers to belong to trade unions and to be engaged in the collective bargaining process. This in my view is a reasonable undertaking in a civilized society and it explains why we have not hesitated to ratify and honour various conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO).

However, it would be a backward step for all of us – for the process we are seeking to consolidate here – if concerns for labour standards and workers' rights were to serve as a pretext for countries to institute new barriers to trade. This we must avoid at all costs.

As I said at the beginning of this presentation, Guyana comes to Seattle with a clear objective in mind, that is to bring about a positive and balanced outcome at this Third Ministerial Meeting of the WTO. This can only be accomplished in an atmosphere of transparency and inclusivity. No "Green Room", "Blue Room" or whatever room can accomplish this.

It is for this reason that I want to sound a warning to this august gathering that nothing short of a consensus Declaration is acceptable. In this regard, all are involved, all are consumed.

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