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TUNISIA

More than 30 years ago, the Uruguay Round was launched in this part of the world, enabling the subsequent World Trade Organization and multilateral trading system to strengthen the rules laid down under the GATT, incorporating major sectors of the economy in order to meet the aspirations of most countries.

Today, the WTO is a fundamental pillar and guarantor of the stability of the global economic order. Preserving and strengthening the WTO are a challenge as well as a responsibility incumbent on all Members to maintain an open and rules-based multilateral trading system.

The system is destined to improve and needs to evolve to ensure that the benefits of trade liberalization are secured for all. It should provide increased support for the developing countries in their domestic efforts to achieve the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, further the expansion of global trade and growth, and hence foster world peace and security.

Tunisia has undertaken major reform efforts under its 2016-2020 development plan aimed at bolstering the economy and enhancing growth prospects.

Tunisia hopes that reform of the rules of the multilateral trading system will underpin its efforts at domestic level. We underscore the need for the WTO to continue eliminating barriers to market access for small developing countries in particular, so as to make trade work as an engine of growth and development.

Agriculture and development should be addressed as a matter of priority. The excessive inequalities that impede the developing countries from increasing their participation in agricultural trade require the elimination of distortions so as to ensure greater equity in the rules of the Agreement on Agriculture and provide better market access for these countries.

I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate Tunisia's pragmatic and realistic request that agricultural tariffs be simplified, which would lead to clearer, more transparent and predictable market access conditions, and would help to drive agricultural development and food insecurity reduction programmes forward.

The adoption of a permanent solution for food security is one of the issues that should be resolved during this Conference, setting an example of rules that allow sufficient space for development policies.

The time has come for the development dimension to take centre stage again with more effective special and differential treatment provisions.

The post-Buenos Aires work programme should thus firmly address all these issues.

Tunisia is ready to engage, including on any matter that offers the country genuine opportunities to develop production sectors and has reached a sufficient level of maturity in the discussions.

We welcome the progress achieved as regards the elimination of subsidies that contribute to overcapacity and overfishing, and seek similar advances on the other issues.

We also call on the entire WTO Membership to facilitate and accelerate the accession process for all acceding countries so as to increase the universality of the system.

As Winston Churchill was known to say, "Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all the others". Albeit not perfect, the WTO enables the multilateral trading system to operate.

Before concluding, I would like to recall that the 2015 Nobel Peace Prize was appropriately awarded to Tunisia as a result of the compromise achieved between two initially opposing parties, thanks to dialogue, consensus and awareness of the vital issues at stake for all concerned.

This is the spirit that should imbue the proceedings of this Conference and the work of the WTO in general if we truly want to strengthen multilateralism and international cooperation.
