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**STATEMENT BY HON. MR MANQOBA B. KHUMALO (MP)
MINISTER OF COMMERCE, INDUSTRY AND TRADE**

ESWATINI

Please allow me on behalf of the Kingdom of Eswatini to congratulate the Government and People of the United Arab Emirates in hosting the 13th WTO Ministerial Conference. My delegation is most grateful for the warm and friendly hospitality extended to us since our arrival in this beautiful city of Abu Dhabi. The thirteenth session takes place as we mark the 30th anniversary since the establishment of the WTO. We feel honored to share this great milestone with a sister country and we wish to express our full solidarity and support for the success of this Conference.

My delegation wishes to reaffirm the principles and objectives enshrined in the Marrakesh Agreement and underscore the importance of the rules-based, open, fair, inclusive, equitable, and transparent multilateral trading system with the WTO at its core. We commend the WTO Director-General, Dr Ngozi in advancing the multilateral agenda, particularly the fisheries subsidies negotiations. During this Conference we look forward in seeing meaningful progress on other issues including *inter alia* Agriculture, NAMA, Services, TRIPS waiver, Trade and Industrial Policy, e-commerce, Trade and Environment and Aid for trade.

My delegation wishes to associate itself with the statements made by the African and OACP Groups to reaffirm the Doha Development Agenda (DDA), and the Declarations and Decisions adopted at Doha and at the Ministerial Conferences held since then. The DDA framework under which this round of negotiations was established is fundamental to the most vulnerable in this Organization because it embodies the notion that trade is not merely an end in itself but a means to development and prosperity, particularly to our SMEs, women and the youth. So long as trade does not deliver on inclusive growth and development, it shall remain an empty promise to the poor. It is therefore deeply regrettable that there has not been much progress in the negotiations since our last gathering in June 2022 in Geneva, particularly on the development issues which are fundamental to developing countries including LDCs.

Agriculture remains a priority in pursuing the developmental objectives of most developing countries and about 70% of the rural poor derive their livelihood and incomes from this sector in Eswatini. However, despite all efforts to advance the negotiations and achieve a balanced outcome in the key areas of the agriculture negotiations by the Membership, and especially by the countries that stand to benefit most from a change in prevailing multilateral rules; it is lamentable that we have been unable to reach convergence on the core issues, and reform agriculture, the most trade-distorted sector in the context of WTO rules.

An outcome on agriculture that builds on the Decisions taken at MC12, prioritizing food security is very critical, hence the work of the Working Group on Food Security, that was established along with the work programme mandated by Paragraph 8 of the MC12 Ministerial Declaration on the Emergency Response to Food Insecurity must continue. In addition, the continuation of the reform process in agriculture must meaningfully address the food security concerns of Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Net Food Importing Developing Countries (NFIDs). Further, it is fundamental to preserve the policy space for developing countries under Article 6.2 of the Agreement on Agriculture to unlock their productive capacity and pursue industrial & rural development, agricultural transformation, and livelihood objectives.

My delegation strongly underscores the centrality of development in the work of the WTO and stands firmly behind the principles under which the DDA was launched, especially, Less than Full Reciprocity and Special and Differential Treatment (S&DT) for Developing Countries, in particular for Least-Developed Countries (LDCs), Small and Vulnerable economies (SVEs), and Net Food-Importing Developing Countries (NFIDCs). In this regard, Eswatini stresses the importance of protecting and building on progress achieved so far in the DDA negotiations, especially the preservation of flexibilities so far stabilized across the spectrum in Agriculture, Fisheries Subsidies, NAMA and in Services for these special groups. Many of those S&D specific proposals address the industrialization concerns of my country and give us the policy space to be able to implement policies that protect and grow our nascent industries, in line with Africa's Industrialization Development mandate, as well as the African Union's agenda 2063 on boosting intra-Africa Trade and in the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

The reform of the WTO is critical to ensure that the rules based multilateral trading system remains relevant and also that pressing global challenges such as food security, pandemic responses and climate change mostly affecting developing countries are addressed. We reaffirm the need for a WTO reform process that would include proposals from all Members in a fair, transparent, inclusive and non-discriminatory manner. We also recall the importance of the development dimension as an integral part of any reform of the WTO. Concerning the TRIPS waiver, Eswatini supports the proposal on the extension of the Waiver to also cover therapeutics and diagnostics, as soon as possible considering the emergence of new COVID-19 variants which endangers human life, particularly in most developing countries' economies. The escalation of discriminatory measures and non-tariff barriers on exports from developing countries, particularly Technical Barriers to Trade, Sanitary and Phytosanitary measures, and onerous private standards imposed by developed countries in the guise of climate change cannot be ignored and needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. Eswatini would fully support capacity building and technical assistance programmes for developing countries under the Aid for Trade initiative to address such concerns.

Before concluding my statement, allow me to congratulate the Comoros and Timor-Leste on the occasion of their formal accession to the WTO at this Ministerial gathering. Also, my delegation reaffirms its full solidarity with all African Countries, particularly LDCs, that are currently in the process of accession to the WTO.

In closing, my delegation recognizes and applauds the achievements of this Organization over the past three decades, especially the adoption of the Fisheries Subsidies Agreement which my Government is in the active process of ratifying, and we reiterate that the WTO shall remain the primary forum to negotiate Multilateral Trade Rules. In this vain, my delegation urges that all issues remaining unresolved, be addressed and concluded under the auspices and principles of the DDA and we caution against attempts to reinterpret, change, or as recently proposed by some Members in this house, ABANDON the agreed mandates or deviate from the agreed principles in the negotiations. Eswatini remains fully committed and strongly believes in the multilateral trading system and the principles on which it was established.
