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**Ministerial Conference  
Thirteenth Session  
Abu Dhabi, 26-29 February 2024**

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**STATEMENT BY HON. PROF. JEAN CHRYSOSTOME NGABITSINZE  
MINISTER OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY****RWANDA**

The Thirteenth WTO Ministerial Conference is a key opportunity for reviewing the Multilateral Trading System and setting direction on future WTO work. It comes at a time where the global economy's recovery has begun after several disruptions, though further work is clearly needed.

Noting the gravity of the situation and profound implications that will be felt from the outcomes that this forum facilitates, I am confident that we will effectively leverage this opportunity for global cooperation and deliver a productive MC13.

Rwanda acknowledges that economic development is fostered and enhanced through international cooperation, such as the work done at WTO and through the robustness of the Multilateral Trading System. Therefore, Rwanda encourages the maintenance and strengthening of the flexibilities reflective of different countries' capabilities. Rwanda, thus aligns itself with calls to make these flexibilities more precise, effective and operational as per the G90's Agreement Specific Proposals.

These flexibilities allow developing countries to effectively engage in the global community and economy, which we acknowledge as critical to attaining sustainable development. It is in this spirit that Rwanda has participated actively in regional trading initiatives such as the East African Community, Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, and the African Continental Free Trade Area and its Guided Trade Initiative.

Rwanda's commitment to multilateralism and its power to improving lives means that we cherish our membership in the WTO and the role we have played in the Commonwealth of Nations, where His Excellency, President of the Republic of Rwanda currently holds the Chair-in-Office. During the Commonwealth Trade Ministers Meeting in June 2023, Ministers unanimously endorsed Rwanda's proposal to deliver a joint statement in support of the Multilateral trading system on behalf of the Commonwealth Members. Therefore, I am pleased, on behalf of the Commonwealth Trade Ministers, with an exception to India, to communicate the following agreed statement:

1. We the Commonwealth Trade Ministers met in London on 5-6 June 2023 to reaffirm our strong commitment to a transparent, equitable, inclusive, fair, non-discriminatory, open and rules-based multilateral trading system, with the WTO at its core.
2. The multilateral trading system is important for all our Members and in particular for developing countries, including least developed countries and small and vulnerable economies, including small island developing states and landlocked developing countries, to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.
3. We are deeply concerned about the impact of climate change on all our members and call for urgent actions to tackle the climate crisis while ensuring a just and inclusive transition to a green economy.
4. We recognize the ongoing discussions on policy coherence between trade and investment with industrial policy and note the role that regional economic integration can play in strengthening the participation of Member countries in the multilateral trading system.

5. We reiterate our support for WTO reform in all its functions in a balanced and inclusive manner, including development issues, that continues to serve the needs of all its Members. We recognize the current momentum in WTO institutional reform and underscore the importance of continued engagement in improving the operation of WTO bodies and supporting developing country participation in the WTO.

6. We underline the importance and urgency of re-establishing a fully and well-functioning dispute settlement system that is accessible to all Members by 2024.

7. We call for continued reform of the multilateral trading rules for agriculture and the smooth functioning of supply chains, with a view towards achieving reductions in trade distorting support and protection, to enhance food security, especially for net food importing developing countries.

8. We recognize the need for supportive and collaborative policies to narrow the digital divide and enhance digital literacy so that all WTO Members can participate equitably in digital trade.

9. We urge Members to conclude negotiations on outstanding issues related to the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies, with due regard to the principle of special and differential treatment, and ratify and implement the Agreement, including with the support of the Fisheries Funding Mechanism.

10. We urge members to decide on an extension of the TRIPS waiver to cover the production and supply of COVID-19 diagnostics and therapeutics.

11. We express our determination to continue to work collectively and collaborate with all Members with a view to achieving a successful outcome during the 13<sup>th</sup> WTO Ministerial Conference to strengthen the multilateral trading system.

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