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(24-1448)

Page: 1/2

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BENIN

Benin is pleased to take part in the Thirteenth Ministerial Conference and joins other WTO Members in extending its sincere appreciation and deepest gratitude to the UAE authorities for their warm welcome and successful organization of this important event.

Since MC12, the multilateral trade negotiations have regained momentum under the leadership of the Director-General, Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, for whom my country reiterates its full support. This Conference is an opportunity to build on the meaningful results achieved in Geneva in June 2022 and to make further progress in implementing the Doha Development Agenda.

Over 20 years since its launch, the **Doha Round**, with the great and noble ambition of enhancing the participation of developing countries in the multilateral trading system, is still a long way from achieving success and delivering on its promises. During this time, a succession of international crises occurring at an unprecedented rate (health, economic, security, food, climate, etc.) have increased the vulnerability of developing countries, especially least developed countries (LDCs), and exacerbated the structural difficulties that were already impeding their integration into the global economy.

In this context, Benin wishes to solemnly reaffirm its alignment with the positions of the principal groups to which it belongs that defend the needs and priorities of developing countries and LDCs in the multilateral trade negotiations, namely the G90, the G33, the ACP Group, the African Group, the LDC Group, and, last but not least, the C-4.

In the same spirit, Benin would like to:

- congratulate **Comoros** and **Timor-Leste** on their accession to the WTO, which will be ratified during this Conference and will strengthen the influence of developing countries within the Organization;
- commend the progress made with a view to the effective entry into force of the **Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies**, adopted at MC12, and its necessary development into a comprehensive agreement within the framework of the ongoing negotiations on outstanding issues;
- welcome, as a co-sponsor of this initiative, the successful conclusion of negotiations concerning the **Investment Facilitation for Development (IFD) Agreement**, the effective adoption of which during this Ministerial Conference and intended integration into the Marrakesh Agreement will enable greater participation by developing countries in global flows of foreign direct investment (FDI);
- associate itself fully with the Draft Ministerial Declaration, proposed by China and a group of other countries, on strengthening regulatory cooperation to **reduce technical barriers to trade**; and
- congratulate the Director-General for the launch, in collaboration with the World Bank, of the "**Digital Trade in Africa**" (DTA) initiative to support the development of electronic commerce in Africa, and the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding with FIFA to support, among other things, the development of **cotton** value chains in the C-4 countries.

Regarding cotton, the failure to reach a substantive outcome on the thorny issue of **domestic support** after 20 years continues to destroy the efforts and hopes of our small-scale producers, who rightfully aspire to only one thing: to sell their cotton at a fair price on the international market and live with dignity from the fruits of their labour.

Benin therefore urges all WTO Members to support the Draft Ministerial Decision on Cotton submitted by the C-4 and, beyond that, to support, in the wake of the aforementioned WTO-FIFA partnership, ongoing domestic industrialization initiatives, such as the **Glo-Djigbé Special Economic Zone (GDIZ)** launched by the Government of Benin to promote and accelerate local cotton processing as part of a comprehensive and integrated value chain.

Overall, a collective leap is urgently needed to overcome the persistent divisions in the negotiations on agriculture, which are the main stumbling block in the Doha Round. My delegation wishes to reaffirm the importance of the principle of **special and differential treatment** (S&D), that must be maintained and improved in all areas including for the establishment of a permanent solution to the key question of public stockholding for food security purposes (**PSH**).

Other equally important topics of negotiation, such as WTO reform, the e-commerce work programme and moratorium, and the regulation of sanitary and phytosanitary (**SPS**) measures, to name but a few, call for bold and fair solutions that break free from the systemic logic of dominance. Benin is fully committed in this regard and is ready to contribute within the groups to which it belongs so that the multilateral trading system can function better and benefit every WTO Member, regardless of its level of development.

On this note of commitment and hope, I would like to close my remarks by wishing this Conference every success in its work.
