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MAURITIUS

I wish to thank and congratulate the Government of the United Arab Emirates for hosting the 13th Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization. Our thanks also go to the WTO Secretariat for its continuous efforts to support Members.

In the aftermath of the Pandemic, as we still struggle to recover, we are further challenged by multiple interlocking crises, including the cascading effects of geopolitical conflicts. The increasing adoption of unilateral measures further constrains the trading capacity of WTO Members, posing direct threats to our exporting capacity.

This Ministerial Conference is therefore the opportunity for the international community to consolidate an inclusive Multilateral Trading System for sustainable growth. We must ensure that the conduct of trade adheres to a well-defined set of rules and unflinchingly upholds the credibility of the multilateral trading system. Tangible outcomes at MC13 must be in this direction.

As a Small Island Developing State, Mauritius faces inherent constraints such as distance from main markets, connectivity gaps, and high freight costs. Climate emergency and recent challenges, including high inflation and an escalating energy crisis, further compound these difficulties.

It is imperative for the WTO Membership to unite and address SIDS inherent vulnerabilities. A one-size-fits-all approach cannot address the concerns of a very diverse WTO Membership.

We call on the WTO Secretariat to establish a special desk for SIDS, conducting specific analyses and formulating adequate responses to address our concerns. This is crucial to ensure the meaningful participation of SIDS in the multilateral trading system. The WTO should formally recognize SIDS as a distinct category, acknowledge their specific vulnerabilities and ensure that their concerns are reflected in all WTO outcomes.

Mauritius is a Net-Food Importing Developing Country (NFIDC) isolated from its primary markets. We are heavily reliant on the trading system to achieve our food security. Accordingly, Agriculture remains a pressing concern for us, and we want to see measures adopted at MC13 to address the concerns of food deficit countries.

This includes the exercise of flexibility so that NFIDCs are not severely impacted by export restrictions and finding solutions for public stockholding. It also means allowing policy space for us to pursue our agricultural development.

Fisheries also remains an essential part of our food security concerns and is a key element for the development of our Ocean economy. The EEZ of the Republic of Mauritius is far more extensive than its land mass. Whilst this provides an economic opportunity, we are constrained by our capacity to prevent and combat illegal practices and ensure the continued sustainability of our fish stocks in the face of overexploitation of our resources.

Having commonly agreed rules on fisheries and fisheries subsidies is of high importance to ensure that both our food security concerns are met and our Oceans remain sustainable.

We therefore urge the conclusion of the second part of the Fisheries Subsidies Agreement, focusing on concrete disciplines to tackle the issue of overcapacity and overfishing which negatively impacts us.

We look forward to effective Special and Differential Treatment (SDT) under the Fisheries Agreement and a specific carve-out for our small-scale fishermen and activities in our EEZ as a small island developing state.

We urge WTO Members to accelerate outcomes under the Work Programme for Small Economies, with a special focus on SIDS.

In this context, flexibility is key for procuring production inputs and mitigating the high freight costs which small islands face because of their isolation.

To further level the playing field, we call on WTO Members to extend to SIDS technology transfer provisions currently available to Least Developed Countries.

We will continue to reiterate that Special and Different Treatment shall remain at the core of the trading system and needs to be fully applied.

We hope that this Ministerial Conference will launch a series of far-reaching critical reforms, including the management of trade and reinforce the important function of the dispute mechanism for enlarged participation from small players.

The function of the Appellate Body as an integral part of the two-tiered multilateral dispute settlement system is important to preserve an effective multilateral trading system respectful of rules.

We note that the Work Programme on Electronic Commerce has been re-invigorated with discussions on a large number of thematic issues including the scope, definition and impact of the Moratorium. Mauritius is happy to have contributed to this as Facilitator and we believe it is important to pursue this Work Programme. As an OACPS Member, we believe that the Moratorium on customs duties should be further extended to provide predictability to business.

Though we have evolved from the GATT to the WTO, we have so far failed to address the issue of inclusiveness in trade. We recommend strongly that the issues currently under negotiations like trade and industrial policy, meaningful technology transfer, and new areas like cost of remittances, cross border tele-medicine and trading in times of natural disasters need to be examined carefully to see how they can be beneficial to developing countries and in particular SIDS.

Let us seize the opportunity at MC13 to reinforce and promote the Multilateral Trading System, confront global challenges, and pave the way for a more inclusive and equitable international trade landscape, leaving no one behind.
