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KENYA

It is with great pleasure that I take this singular opportunity to thank the Chair of the 13<sup>th</sup> WTO Ministerial Conference H.E Dr Thani bin Ahmed Al Zeyoudi, Minister of State for Foreign Trade of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), for hosting us in Abu Dhabi on this auspicious occasion. I also wish to sincerely thank the Director-General of the WTO, Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, and the WTO Secretariat for all the preparations towards this important Conference.

I similarly wish to recognize my fellow Ministers, the Chair of the General Council, Chairpersons of the various WTO Committees, and all Delegates who have contributed to the successful holding of this important Conference. Let me also thank the Government of the UAE for the hospitality and for hosting the Conference in the wonderful Capital of Abu Dhabi.

We have converged in Abu Dhabi close to three decades since the establishment of the WTO back in April 1994. The aspiration of the founders of the WTO to strengthen the world economy and lead to more trade, investment, employment and income growth throughout the world is still firmly alive. However, a number of emergent uncertainties that have rocked the world in recent years have blurred the original dream of the WTO. From the on-going geopolitical tension in Europe to the war in the Middle East and the festering Red Sea crisis, global trade has suffered many a setback primarily due to massive supply chain disruptions. The attendant distortions have resorted in the skyrocketing of prices of crucial commodities.

The triple planetary crises of pollution, climate change, and loss of biodiversity, meanwhile, continue to ravage many countries, with distinctly devastating impacts on some of the most vulnerable economies, even as they try to wriggle out of the disastrous after-effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The growing geopolitical conflicts and the rising tensions among superpowers have strained what is considered the most critical link holding the globalised world together – trust. Beneficial interdependence of world economies rests on mutual trust and shared purpose. Therefore, willingness of nations to reduce or eliminate trade barriers, keenness to rely on one another for critical supplies and technologies and readiness to work with, rather than against each other to deliver win-win socio-economic outcomes is a critical imperative.

This prevailing situation calls for a re-examination of the role of trade in addressing some of the most pressing challenges of our time – maintaining peace and security, reducing poverty and inequality, addressing environmental challenges and achieving inclusive and sustainable development. It is worth noting that international trade, anchored on a strengthened multilateral trading system, plays an indispensable role in achieving a more secure, resilient, equitable, inclusive and sustainable world.

We therefore should revitalize the multilateral trading system to be responsive to contemporary and emerging issues and restore trust in the system to achieve the desired goals. Above all, it is important to ensure that all Members feel part of the process and the outcomes. We commend our experts for the efforts they have made in the negotiations in time for this Ministerial Conference, despite the few impediments that seem to stand on the way to reaching a quick consensus.

Among our priorities for MC13 are adoption of tighter disciplines on subsidies that contribute to overcapacity and overfishing, particularly for large scale, industrial distant water fishing. We urgently need in place special and differential treatment provisions that avail us the desired policy space to develop our marine fisheries sector. We also need to extend more structured support to small scale and artisanal fishing. We, therefore, look forward to the conclusion of the second phase of the fisheries negotiations to pave the way for a sustainable Blue Economy – and specifically, fishing industry – regimen globally.

Thankfully, we are in the last stages of finalising our internal procedures for ratification of the Fisheries Subsidies Agreement and will soon deposit our instrument of acceptance with the Director-General.

Agriculture is a crucial aspect of Kenya's economy. It is vitally critical with regard to food security. Even though we are deeply concerned with the lack of progress in the agriculture reform negotiations, we are optimistic that this Ministerial Conference will deliver outcomes that will provide respite for developing countries, particularly Net Food-Importing Countries (NFIDCs) and Least Developed Countries (LDCs), which are disproportionately affected by food insecurity. We also should agree on principles that will underpin negotiations towards the delivery of outcomes that address market distortions and structural causes of food and livelihood security.

On WTO reforms, we commend Members on efforts made thus far to fulfil the MC12 mandate of reforming the WTO to address the challenges that it is facing and ensure its proper functioning. We laud the reform-by-doing approach noting that this is an ongoing process that requires trials and periodic assessment of what works better for the organisation and its Members.

The Dispute Settlement System is a cardinal pillar of the multilateral trading system, and we therefore take note of the ongoing informal reform discussions. We call on expeditious formalisation of this process in order to ensure that that all Members contribute to the deliberations. At this Conference, we should instruct our experts to work within clear timelines to fulfil the MC12 mandate of ensuring a fully and well-functioning dispute settlement system accessible to all Members, including the restoration of the appellate mechanism.

On the Development agenda, we remain hopeful that concurrence on the Agreement-Specific Proposals (ASPs), particularly those that relate to the Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) and Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Agreements will be reached. The objective of these proposals is to ensure stability, predictability and transparency in the implementation of the existing Special and Differential Treatment provisions, and not to demand for more flexibilities nor seek blanket exemptions from existing commitments. We therefore expect MC13 to deliver meaningful outcomes on the core elements contained in the two ASPs.

In conclusion, I congratulate the Union of the Comoros and the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste on their accession to the WTO. I join other Members in welcoming them and call on all of us to support them as they implement their new commitments.

I look forward to successful and productive engagements with fellow Ministers in Abu Dhabi, to ensure that MC13 delivers on the expectations of the Members.

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