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Statement by the Honourable Mustafa Bello Minister of Commerce

1. It is an honour and a privilege for me to address this distinguished audience. I bring with me felicitations from the Government and people of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, on the occasion of the Third Ministerial Conference of the WTO, holding in this beautiful city of Seattle. Our thanks and appreciation go to the Government and people of the United States of America for hosting the Third Session of the WTO Ministerial Conference, and for the hospitality they have extended to make our stay comfortable and productive.

2. This Third Session of the WTO Ministerial Conference is extremely important for a number of reasons. First, this is being held to launch the mandated negotiations on agriculture and services under the WTO *Built-in Agenda*. This will be the launch of negotiations, only equal in importance to the negotiations launched in Uruguay in 1986. Second, this Meeting is being held at the dawn of the new Millennium. The challenges and opportunities presented by the forces of globalization are immense, and we have a unique opportunity to send a powerful message of equality and prosperity to all the nations of the world at the start of the new Millennium. Third, the Meeting is being hosted by the U.S., which has always been the leader in the efforts for a liberalized global economy.

3. While the rule-based multilateral trading system of the WTO provides stability and predictability in international trade relations, we should use the opportunity of this Conference to take steps to make the WTO more responsive to the needs and aspirations of developing countries, especially with respect to concerns in the area of implementation. Agriculture and textiles are obvious examples of this lack of implementation in letter and spirit by developed countries. Let me emphasise that Nigeria considers the implementation of the Final Act of the Uruguay Round a priority. Secondly, developing countries do not have the necessary human, financial and institutional resources to implement all their commitments, particularly under Agreements such as TRIPS, TRIMs and Custom Valuation. This is more so as, the promises of technical and financial assistance made during the Uruguay Round negotiations have, unfortunately not been fulfilled by developed countries. Thirdly, provisions on Special and Differential (S&D) treatment for developing countries contained in many WTO Agreements have not been implemented. This is an area of major interest to developing countries. The lack of implementation of these provisions for want of clear implementation modalities in the Agreements or political commitment by developed country Members, has disturbed the balance of rights and obligations. Finally, many Agreements do not fully take into account the interests and problems of developing countries. The experience in the past five years has shown, and many academics and NGOs even in the North also agree, that there are serious problems in the structure and substantive provisions of many Agreements. This aspect of implementation deserves our priority attention.

4. Let me reiterate that a major problem is a lack of resources which hinders many developing countries from taking full advantage of the WTO. The most obvious examples of these include: The

lack of participation by a large number of developing countries in the dispute settlement procedures; the lack of capacity to participate effectively at the numerous committee meetings; and the non-physical representation of numerous developing countries who do not have any Mission in Geneva, to monitor and participate in the WTO negotiating process. Massive technical assistance, therefore, is required to address these problems to enable Nigeria and other developing countries cope with the demands of the WTO and to participate and benefit from the system. Such technical assistance should be part and parcel of the regular annual budget of the WTO, in addition to the bilateral assistance rendered by several developed countries for which we are grateful.

5. The above clearly demonstrates that developing countries have not been able to participate and benefit equally for the rule-based system of the WTO. And let me emphasize the importance of equity and fairness. No system, however rule-based, can command the respect of all unless it is also regarded as equitable and fair. I would, therefore, urge you to give this issue the attention that it deserves. We have to ensure that the system works for all. For developing countries, this means the resolution of all the implementation problems that they have pointed out during the preparatory process to this Session of the Ministerial Conference. We are also concerned that several countries are not yet able to join the WTO due to stringent conditions required for their accession. We call for their accession to be accelerated to enable them to join in strengthening the Multilateral Trading System (MTS), as well as enjoy the promised "benefits" of the WTO. I would in particular, commend the effort being made towards the accession of the People's Republic of China.

6. Millions of the world's population are unemployed, millions are hungry. The number increases on a daily basis and civil society blames liberalization and globalizaton for these two evils. There is a lot of frustration and a growing feeling of inequality and marginalization among developing countries in the WTO. This is real, and poses a great danger if added to the feelings of the unemployed and the hungry. These developments cannot continue to be over-looked or ignored as we enter the new Millennium. A game of unequals is certainly an uninteresting show and becomes a frustrating experience for both sides. Developed countries should take clear and definite actions to assist developing and in particular LDCs, a majority of which are in Africa, to overcome problems associated with structural reforms and heavy debt burden mitigating against their economic recovery and growth. Increasing Official Development Assistance (ODA) and the granting of debt relief should be a step in the right direction.

7. Nigeria views with great concern the absence of any appreciable market access for products of export interest to developing countries. This is a clear indication of the fact that despite offers, binding and non-binding, made in the Uruguay Round, there still exists a number of non-tariff barriers which inhibit access to markets of developed country Members. Some of the barriers include sanitary and phytosanitary measures, tariff escalation and tariff peaks. These barriers should be removed in order to make market-access commitments realistic and possible. The erosion of preferences is also a source of concern to Nigeria.

8. On the Singapore subjects, Nigeria acknowledges the important work so far carried out in the Working Groups on Investment, Competition Policy, Government Procurement and Trade Facilitation. Our position is that the learning process in these areas should continue, and further analytical work should be done to ascertain and clarify the issues involved in the area of electronic commerce in view of the cross-sectorial nature of this subject. We support that the current moratorium on the imposition of customs duties be extended to the 4th Ministerial Conference when it will be reviewed.

9. On the issue of environment and labour standards in the agenda for future negotiations, the question is not whether these are objectives worthy of international co-operation and negotiations. The real substance is whether the WTO is the right place for such co-operation. Under the circumstance, Nigeria shares the view that the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) have the mandate, experience and capacity to deal with these issues. Our efforts, therefore, should be to assist these international institutions in carrying out

their respective mandates and work programmes. In our assessment, attempts to overload the WTO Agenda with non-trade issues will be counter-productive. It will mean that while the WTO will not have enough time to contribute meaningfully to environmental and labour issues, it will also lose the capacity to deliver on the issues of trade liberalization.

10. Nigeria, while supportive of a new Round on the basis of consensus, we also share the view that such a Round should focus primarily on implementation issues and the mandated negotiations. The Round should take into account the development dimension, and the needs and capacity of developing countries. Finally, the Round should be balanced and comprehensive.
