

Preface: The Collapse at Cancún

The 5th Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Cancún, Mexico, September 10 – 14 2003, ended without conclusion when Conference Chairman and Mexican Foreign Minister Luis Ernesto Derbez, having determined that it would not be possible to reach consensus across the agenda and on a Ministerial Text, gavelled the meeting to a close.¹

In his closing remarks Minister Derbez emphasized that he had tried to conduct a transparent and open process, and that it was not until he had heard from the group of less developed countries² that they rejected any compromise on the Singapore issues (offered in late movement by the European Union) that he made his decision not to continue his consultations.³ However, while the Singapore issues proved to be the rock on which negotiations foundered, a host of other issues on which agreement was never tested (most prominently agriculture) could as easily have played that role. Discord ranged over essentially the full slate of negotiating issues. In addition to the Singapore issues, WTO Members were also significantly divided on the modalities for each of the three pillars in agriculture (export subsidies, domestic

¹ For a full summary of the Cancún conference see Bernard Hoekman and Richard Newfarmer, "After Cancún: Continuation or Collapse" in *Trade Note*, The World Bank, December 17 2003. Ministerial Participants, including the US, EU, Mexico, Brazil and Malaysia also offered their own views on Cancún in a collection *Where next for the WTO? After Cancún: Views, ideas and proposals by trade ministers*, (London The Federal Trust for Education and Research and Commonwealth Business Council, 2003). http://www.fedtrust.co.uk/uploads/FedT_CBC_Compendium.pdf

² This group, referred to as the G-90, emerged as a coalition of the least developed countries (LDCs), the African Union and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group. For a perspective on its formation and aims from one of its members, see "Opening Remarks of the Minister of Foreign Trade and International Cooperation, Hon. Clement J. Rohee, at the Meeting of Ministerial Representatives of the G-90 in Georgetown, Guyana, 3-4 June", <http://www.crn.org/documents/wto/Opening%20Remarks%20by%20Hon.%20Clement%20J.%20Rohee%20G-90%20-%20Guyana.pdf>, accessed 9 September 2004.

³ The Singapore issues include: competition policy, investment, trade facilitation and government procurement.