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INFORMAL MINISTERIAL MEETING VANCOUVER, NOVEMBER 23-24, 1995

CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT BY THE HONOURABLE ROY MACLAREN, MINISTER FOR INTERNATIONAL TRADE

The two-day discussion among the eleven ministers and five senior representatives participating in these informal meetings has demonstrated the profound commitment we share to the World Trade Organization [WTO] and the rules-based trading system. Our frank and constructive exchange is one of several informal meetings involving WTO members in the run-up to the first Ministerial Conference of the WTO in Singapore in December 1996.

Ministers from Australia, Hong Kong, Hungary, Indonesia, Morocco, New Zealand, Norway, Singapore, South Africa and Thailand and senior representatives from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico and Switzerland discussed the challenges facing the WTO and the preparations for the first Ministerial Conference. The presence of the WTO Director General, Renato Ruggiero, added greatly to these discussions. We did not meet to come to decisions but rather to develop an understanding of what needs to be done to implement existing obligations and to identify new issues which should be discussed in the WTO.

The exchange began on the theme of domestic priorities: using the multilateral trading system to help governments and the private sector achieve their economic goals. While WTO members represented at the meeting are at different levels of development, we were able to identify areas where we share domestic economic goals. We recognize that increased trade is essential to the realization of these goals. We discussed the need to assist the least-developed countries including better market access by all WTO members in sectors where they are competitive.



From the perspective of our domestic priorities we discussed the type of agenda we would like to see developed for the first Ministerial Conference. The agenda must be a balanced one, meeting the needs of all members, especially the least developed. It must be based on a realistic assessment of what can be achieved against the backdrop of implementing fully our Uruguay Round obligations. And it must be ambitious to position the WTO to be the dynamic negotiating forum that we as governments require in an evolving and a globalizing economy.

On this basis, we noted that preparatory work should be initiated before, or at, Singapore to help us fulfil the commitments for further work incorporated in the Uruguay Round Agreements. We noted the commitment for further liberalization in the areas of agriculture and services, to commence no later than 1998 and 2000. We noted the commitments to review the rules in several agreements. We had a useful discussion on the WTO built-in future agenda; views were expressed as to the sufficiency and timing of its various elements.

Beyond the existing commitments, we discussed the impact of economic and political trends that have become more marked since the Uruguay Round was conceived and even since the agreements were signed in 1994. Among these are the rapid growth in investment flows, the linkages between trade and competition policy and the potential trade impact of regulatory reform programs which point to the need to begin discussion of these issues in the WTO. We discussed the increasing number of regional trade arrangements. We agreed on the critical importance of ensuring that these initiatives contribute to the strength of the multilateral trading system. We will work with our partners in these arrangements and with our partners in the WTO to achieve this.

The issue of trade and labour standards was discussed. We concluded that a consensus does not yet exist for a constructive dialogue in the WTO on this topic. We noted the work now under way in other relevant institutions, particularly the ILO [International Labour Organization]. Several observed that the onus is on those who advocate a discussion in the WTO to establish a sound analytical basis for such a dialogue. This must include a clear definition of the issues and agreement on the parameters of the discussion. Such parameters must reflect the trade-related competence of the WTO, the consensual nature of the WTO and the commitment of WTO members to a rules-based trading system.

We reviewed the negotiations in services sectors undertaken since WTO ministers last gathered at Marrakesh. This discussion included ongoing negotiations in basic telecommunications and maritime services where we acknowledged the need for intensive negotiations and the benefits that would flow from their success.

We discussed some of the difficulties experienced with the start-up of the new institution. And we considered the future negotiations process of the multilateral trading system with the inauguration of biennial Ministerial Conferences beginning with the 1996 Singapore Conference. We will continue to discuss with our WTO partners how to provide the necessary political guidance for the trading system.

Our commitment to the multilateral trading system has many sources. It rests on our experience of growth and prosperity flowing from increased trade and investment. It reflects our belief in the equity of a rules-based system shaped by the agreement of all participating governments. These are the inspirations that will guide us as we discuss with our partners in the WTO the preparations for the Singapore Ministerial Conference and the Conferences to follow it in 1998 and 2000.

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