

ABUJA MINISTERIAL DECLARATION ON THE FOURTH MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE OF THE WTO

1. We, the Ministers of Trade of the Member States of the Organisation of African Unity/African Economic Community (OAU/AEC) have met at the Fourth Ordinary Session of the OAU/AEC Ministers of Trade Committee on Trade, Customs and Immigration in Abuja, Nigeria, from 22-23 September 2001, to inter alia consider a number of issues of developmental importance to Africa, including coordinating our positions towards the Fourth WTO Ministerial Meeting to be held in Doha, Qatar, from 9 to 13 November 2001.
2. We reaffirm our commitment to the rules-based Multilateral Trading System (MTS) as an instrument for the promotion of economic development, the facilitation of African integration into the global economy, and the eradication of poverty. We further recognise the importance of the rules-based MTS in managing globalisation and reducing the scope for unilateral action. A major challenge facing all WTO Members is to respond in a manner that supports Africa's development and integration into the MTS.
3. In this regard, we agree that there is an urgent need for developmental issues to be put at the centre-stage at the WTO. This will require improving real access to developed countries' markets for products and services of export interest to African countries; addressing asymmetries in existing Agreements; enhancing productive capacities, including facilitating the transfer of technology; and improving technical co-operation and capacity building. The objective should be the achievement of global growth and development for all members, while decisively addressing the present inequities in the MTS. In this context, we have adopted Africa's negotiating objectives for the Fourth Ministerial Conference of the WTO contained in the appended document.
4. We reaffirm that Special and Differential (S & D) Treatment for developing countries is a core principle of the WTO. The rationale for S&D remains valid for developing countries in general, and African countries in particular, given the structural weaknesses in their economies and their declining share of world trade. We further affirm our commitment to ensuring that S&D provisions are made meaningful and operational by adopting a Decision at Doha to make them legally binding.
5. We further reaffirm that trade preferences have a crucial role in Africa's economic development. Existing preferences must, therefore, remain meaningful, effective and must be binding. Any new preferences granted should not undermine existing terms and conditions of access. Furthermore, Africa should be assisted to make full use of and benefit from enhanced preferences.
6. We urge developed country members of the WTO to fulfil their obligations and undertakings with regard to capacity building and other technical assistance support to developing and least developed countries in letter and spirit. In this respect, we have taken stock of the information submitted to them by the ITC, UNCTAD and WTO and the pilot countries on Joint Integrated Technical Assistance Programme for Selected Least Developed and Other African Countries (JITAP), its implementation and achievements. We express satisfaction at the results achieved and recommend the consolidation and the extension of JITAP within the pilot countries to ensure the full achievement of the objectives. We

also call for the expansion of JITAP to other African countries.

7. It is vital that current and future work must enhance coherence amongst the Bretton Woods institutions and the WTO, with a view to ensuring policy consistency, improved co-ordination on technical and financial assistance, improving foreign direct investment (FDI) flows, reduction of the debt burden and eradicating poverty. To this end, we call for a more meaningful implementation of the "Declaration on the Contribution of the World Trade Organisation to Achieving Greater Coherence in Global Economic Policymaking".

8. We call for support in the implementation of the New African Initiative and the World Solidarity Fund. We note that the New African Initiative, which was formally endorsed by the Lusaka Summit of the African Heads of State and Government and the Group of Seven (G.7) Summit in Genoa is an important initiative from Africa, which should be supported through technical and financial assistance.

9. We reiterate our concern with the imbalances in the WTO Agreement. We underscore the difficulties that many African countries face in adapting their laws and regulations and improving their institutional capacities to meet their WTO obligations. In this context, we stress that implementation issues are a priority for African countries in the run-up to the 4th Ministerial Conference of the WTO. We, therefore, reaffirm the need to resolve outstanding Implementation issues.

10. We emphasize the urgent necessity for the full implementation of the Plan of Action adopted by the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries (LDC III). We reaffirm our concern at the delay in the implementation of the Integrated Framework since the launching of this programme at the High Level Meeting on LDCs held in Geneva in October 1997 and urgently appeal to the concerned partners in this programme to honour the commitments they undertook in this regard.

11. We further urge the full operationalisation of the Decision on Measures Concerning the Possible Negative Effects of the Reform Programme on LDCs and Net Food Importing Developing Countries.

12. We call on WTO members to establish a work programme on small economies and for the General Council to report on the implementation thereof prior to the Fifth WTO Ministerial Conference.

13. In view of the difficulties experienced by a number of African countries - some of which are LDCs - in their accession to the WTO, we call on Members to refrain from placing excessive or onerous demands on such applications, and to maintain a transparent, streamlined and accelerated accession process.

14. We reviewed the on-going mandated negotiations on Agriculture and Services, and noted the developments in these negotiations. We express a determination that Agriculture negotiations produce - within a reasonable period of time - improved and effective market access for African exports. On Services, we emphasize the need for effective implementation of GATS provisions on improving market access in sectors and modes of export interest to African countries.

15. We recognize that issues such as Trade and Investment, Competition, Transparency in Government Procurement, Trade Facilitation, Trade and Environment and E-Commerce are important.

However, we agree that these issues are not a priority at this stage and on-going processes should continue in order to prepare for possible future work in this area.

16. We affirm the common understanding that the TRIPS Agreement allows Members to take all necessary measures to provide access to medicine at affordable prices and promote public health and nutrition. We, further, reiterate the need for adequate protection of traditional knowledge and genetic resources.

17. We underscore our view that regional and sub-regional integration among developing countries are essential to reversing the process of marginalisation and constitute a dynamic building block for their effective integration into the MTS.

18. We regret the lack of progress on the issue of granting of Observer Status and in this regard, we reiterate the need to grant Permanent Observer Status to the Organisation of African Unity/African Union (OAU/AU) and other inter-governmental organisations in view of their trade policy mandate.

19. We recognize the critical importance of a transparent and inclusive decision-making process in the WTO and that this is vital to maintaining confidence in the Organisation. In this regard, a Ministerial Decision is required at Doha to guarantee that the process of decision-making is transparent and inclusive in the WTO.

20. We thank the Government and People of the Federal Republic of Nigeria for hosting the meeting, for the warm hospitality and for all the facilities put at our disposal.

Done in Abuja, Nigeria on this day of 23 September 2001