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Statement by H.E. Mr Anand Sharma
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It gives me great pleasure to be in the midst of this distinguished gathering along with my Ministerial colleagues for the Eighth Ministerial Conference of the WTO.

When we had last assembled in Geneva for MC7 there was a ray of hope that the global economy had finally emerged from the shadow of a grim recessionary period. Yet, the events of the last two years have brought out the stark reality that the fundamental fault lines in the global financial architecture still remain. We have been concerned by the fragile nature of recovery and the prevailing uncertainty especially in the Euro Zone. We have a peculiar situation where the harbingers of free trade have themselves started looking inwards. In the challenging backdrop of global economic downturn, all countries must eschew protectionism which can only be counterproductive as it will deepen the recession and delay recovery. The need of the hour is enhanced economic engagement and free flow of trade.

In a global economy almost relentlessly under siege, the WTO has an important role to play. We welcome the accession of Montenegro, the Russian Federation, Samoa and Vanuatu. Their inclusion is a welcome affirmation of faith in the multilateral trading system.

India welcomes the LDC-related decisions for adoption at this Ministerial. While this is less than what we have strived for over the last several months, these decisions will send out a positive signal about WTO's commitment to the Development Agenda.

India has always accorded high priority to the Services Waiver for LDCs and we welcome the decision in this regard. We support the proposed streamlining of accession process for LDCs which is a step forward on the LDC accession guidelines adopted in 2002. The LDC request for an extension of their transition period under Article 66.1 of the TRIPS Agreement has our support.

India is concerned at the current impasse in the DDA negotiations. While the last few years of the Round have been disappointing, we cannot cast aside the mandate that was so arduously negotiated. Nor can we abandon the processes that make the WTO a uniquely democratic institution.

The WTO negotiations have always used a combination of approaches but always within the principles of transparency, inclusiveness and multilateral consensus-based agreement. We must not deviate from these tried and tested principles.

The negotiations must take place in accordance with the mandate of the Doha Development Agenda, which means that decisions have to necessarily be based on multilateral consensus, regardless of the format in which negotiations take place.

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I have heard suggestions for negotiating issues amongst a critical mass of Members. This path is fraught with risk. Plurilateral agreements are a throwback to the days when decisions taken by a few determined the future of the rest. They also lack the in-built checks and balances of a multilateral forum.

The DDA mandate offers us the flexibility to implement agreements reached at an early stage on a provisional or a definitive basis. However, in practice that can be a difficult exercise as we have learnt from the efforts to put together first, an LDC package and then an "LDC-plus" package. There are lessons to be learnt from these attempts. It is a path on which we must proceed with caution, not for a moment forgetting that this is a development round. Therefore, development issues, those particularly of interest to LDCs such as DFQF, Cotton, should be the foremost priority in any early harvest.

The decision on duty-free quota-free market access to LDCs requires full implementation. Despite our domestic sensitivities, India was the first developing country to extend duty-free quota-free access to all LDCs in line with the WTO's Hong Kong Ministerial mandate. India's Duty Free Tariff Preference Scheme for LDCs came into effect in August 2008 with tariff reductions spread over five years. This Scheme covers about 92.5 per cent of global exports of all LDCs and provides duty-free and preferential tariff access on 94 per cent of India's tariff lines. We now propose to expand the coverage of the scheme further in line with the mandate.

We would urge all developed Members to commit to duty-free and quota-free market access as per the Hong Kong Ministerial Declaration on priority basis, preferably within July 2012.

On the issue of Cotton, there is an urgent need to fully implement the Hong Kong Ministerial Decision for the developing world, especially the Cotton-4 countries of Africa.

What we have on the table today reflects years and years of hard work and a delicate balance of trade-offs. We must build on the progress already achieved and persevere in our efforts to reach a fair, balanced and equitable outcome to the Round.

While we continue these efforts, let us not forget that the WTO is much more than the Doha Round. The work that goes on from day to day in its regular committees and bodies is the grease that keeps the wheels of the multilateral system turning smoothly. It is important to ensure that this work goes on smoothly and in as efficient a manner as possible.

It is easy to put good ideas on the table but difficult to convert them into solutions for the benefit of the poor and needy. This is a development round and the poor countries have the most at stake. I appeal to you to ensure that we secure what has been settled and to continue in our common endeavour to reach an understanding in the larger interests of the multilateral trading system. If we fail today, we are unlikely to get the same opportunity for a long time to come; if on the other hand, we are able to fulfil the promise held out by the DDA, the WTO will not only endure but grow stronger.
