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**Ministerial Conference
Thirteenth Session
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**COMMUNIQUÉ - ARAB MINISTERIAL MEETING
ABU DHABI, 25 FEBRUARY 2024**

The following communication, dated 25 February 2024, is being circulated at the request of the delegation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on behalf of the Arab Group.

1. **We**, the Ministers and Heads of Delegations of the Arab Countries, have met on 25 February 2024 in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates on the margins of the 13th Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization (MC13).
2. **We express** our sincere thanks to the Government and people of United Arab Emirates (UAE) for their warm welcome, gracious hospitality and excellent work in hosting this Conference.
3. **We confirm** our commitment to active participation in MC13, to ensure its success and reach meaningful and balanced outcomes that will serve the special needs of Developing and Least-Developed Members, including those of the Arab countries. We also encourage all WTO members to work together to ensure a successful MC13.
4. **We recognize** that this Ministerial Conference is taking place amidst a backdrop of mounting challenges in the global economy, *inter alia*, food insecurity, pandemics, climate change and geopolitical tensions especially in the Arab region. As such, we emphasize the vital role that the World Trade Organization (WTO) must play in these difficult times to foster trade and facilitate global growth in an inclusive and equitable manner.
5. **We reaffirm** the principles and objectives set out in the Marrakesh Agreement Establishing the WTO, and underline the critical importance of the rules-based, non-discriminatory, open, fair, inclusive, equitable and transparent multilateral trading system with the WTO at its core. We also recall the Declarations and Decisions adopted at the previous WTO Ministerial Conferences that have been held since then and reaffirm our full commitment to give effect to them. In this regard, we reiterate our commitment to the Doha Development Agenda, as well as to the regular work of the WTO.
6. **We stress** the centrality of the development dimension to the multilateral trading system, with the WTO at its core. The system must be responsive to the needs and realities of Developing and Least-Developed Members. We underscore the importance of Special and Differential Treatment (S&DT) provisions as an integral part in the WTO agreements, and agree that all S&DT provisions have to be reviewed with a view to strengthen and make them more precise, effective, and operational.
7. **We underscore** the critical role the WTO can play in promoting inclusive growth including industrialization, development, and resilience. In this regard, we call for addressing all constraints contained in WTO agreements that limit the policy space available to developing countries, including LDCs, to promote industrialization, economic diversification and structural transformation in these countries.

8. **We emphasize** the importance of technical assistance and capacity building in enabling Developing and Least-Developed Members to engage effectively in the multilateral trading system and the global economy.
9. **We recognize** the need to establish an effective procedure supporting the smooth transition of graduated LDCs towards their new status, through extending the LDC-specific trade-related support measures over a reasonable period of time. We welcome the progress achieved as reflected in the Decision adopted by the General Council in WT/L/1172.
10. **We understand** that financing is a vital tool for development and emphasize the importance of mobilizing domestic and international resources to achieve the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals in a timely manner. We recognize the essential role of the WTO and its technical assistance to member states especially developing countries and LDCs on debt issues, and call for further cooperation between the WTO and the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and other stakeholders.
11. **We recall** the guidance of the MC12 Outcome Document, including on the need to pursue WTO reform through a member-driven, open, inclusive and transparent process that must address the interests of all its members, including on development issues. We commit to work towards necessary reform of the WTO, while reaffirming the foundational principles of the WTO.
12. **We acknowledge** the challenges and concerns with respect to the dispute settlement system including those related to the Appellate Body, recognize the importance and urgency of addressing those challenges and concerns, and remain committed to engage constructively in discussions with the view to having a fully and well-functioning dispute settlement system accessible to all Members by MC14.
13. **We underline** the importance of ensuring the continued flow of food and inputs essential for agricultural and food production and supply chains. In this context, we call on WTO Members, in particular those that are significant exporters of main agricultural products, not to impose agriculture export restrictions and refrain from implementing unjustified trade barriers on agriculture and agri-food products and key agricultural production inputs, considering the needs of developing countries, especially NFIDCs and LDCs to restrict exports of food products as they deem necessary for food security purposes. Furthermore, we call on WTO Members and in accordance with relevant WTO decisions, not to impose restrictions on foodstuffs purchased for non-commercial humanitarian purposes by the World Food Programme.
14. **We underscore** the need for additional flexibilities to allow developing countries, in particular Net-Food Importing Developing Countries (NFIDCs) and Least-Developed Countries (LDCs), to enhance their agricultural productive capacities and agricultural regimes. We affirm the need to adopt and implement the proper policy tools and instruments as contained in the WTO agreements that support production expansion, diversification and technology transfer as means to raise living standards, achieve socio-economic development and increase the share of developing countries and LDCs in global trade.
15. **We stress** the need for WTO Ministers to use MC13 as an opportunity to adopt concrete decisions in support of effective responses to mitigate food insecurity risks in situations of global food market price hikes and volatility.
16. **We underline** the importance of reaching an effective solution to address the imbalance in the Agreement on Agriculture and the food security needs of Developing and Least-Developed Members. We also emphasize the need for addressing all outstanding issues in Agriculture negotiations, particularly those of critical importance to Developing and Least-Developed Members, such as Trade-Distorting Domestic Support, Public Stockholding for Food Security Purposes (PSH), and the Special Safeguard Mechanism (SSM). Accordingly, we urge Members to make all concerted efforts towards achieving tangible progress and balanced outcomes across topics in the negotiations by the Fourteenth Session of the WTO Ministerial Conference (MC14).
17. **We acknowledge** the difficulties that developing countries, in particular Net-Food Importing Developing Countries (NFIDCs) and LDCs continue to face since the Uruguay Round, and we stress on the importance of according them specific measures and flexibilities in all agriculture

negotiations. We recall paragraph 8 of the Ministerial Declaration on the Emergency Response to Food Insecurity and we urge members to reach a consensus on the flexibilities required for Least-Developed Countries (LDCs) and Net Food Importing Developing Countries (NFIDCs) to address food insecurity in emergency situations, and we stress the importance of adoption the report of the Committee on Agriculture (COA) working group in this regard.

18. **We welcome** the adoption of the WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies at the 12th Ministerial Conference which represents a historical achievement as the first SDG target to be met through a multilateral agreement, and we remain firmly committed to its prompt entry into force. We acknowledge the continued commitment of Members to conclude the second wave of negotiations on fisheries subsidies to reach an agreement in the ongoing Thirteenth WTO Ministerial Conference (MC13). We look forward to have effective disciplines addressing the reasons behind overcapacity and overfishing, and we emphasize that, fisheries negotiations should take into account the provisions of special and differential treatment (SDT) with a view to reaching a balanced and mutually acceptable outcome, that contributes to poverty eradication, livelihood and food security and serve the development needs of the WTO Members and in particular developing countries and LDCs.
19. **We highlight** the necessity of working towards enhancing timely, equitable and global access to safe, affordable and effective vaccines, therapeutics, diagnostics and other essential medical goods. We recognize the important role of the multilateral trading system in supporting the expansion and diversification of production of essential goods and related services needed in the fight against COVID-19 and future pandemics, including through identifying opportunities and addressing obstacles and barriers. In this regard, we recall the Ministerial Decision on the TRIPS Agreement on COVID-19 vaccines, and stress on the importance of extending the IP waiver to cover the production and supply of vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics in response to future pandemics.
20. **We recognize** the importance of reinvigorating the discussions on the Work Programme on electronic commerce, taking into account the development dimension. We also agree to maintain the current practice of not imposing customs duties on electronic transmissions until the 14th Ministerial Conference and to hold further deliberations on the scope, definition, and impact of the moratorium, including through the continued examination of empirical evidence.
21. **We take note of** the progress achieved in some important trade related areas such as Investment facilitation for development, digital trade and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises MSMEs. We also take note of the conclusion of the negotiations on an agreement on Investment Facilitation for development and recognize the importance of investment in the promotion of sustainable development, economic growth, poverty reduction, job creation, technology transfer, the expansion and diversification of productive capacity and trade.
22. **We recognize** the extensive commitments made by Article XII Members during their respective accessions, and the need to give full recognition and proper consideration to their special situation in the negotiations.
23. **We acknowledge** that accession to the WTO is a crucial step for countries striving for development and integration into the multilateral trading system. Therefore, we call upon all WTO Members to facilitate and accelerate the accession of Developing and Least-Developed Countries including Arab Countries and extend all possible assistance for a smooth and successful accession process.
24. **We warmly welcome** the accession of the Union of the Comoros to the WTO, which strengthens the Arab presence within this Organization, since this accession brings the number of Arab members of the Organization to 14. We also welcome the accession of Timor-Leste and consider that each successful accession advances the truly global nature of the WTO and results in actual benefits for all the membership. We reaffirm our commitments made at MC12 to facilitate the conclusion of ongoing accessions, especially for the LDCs.
25. **We affirm** the importance of the Trade Policy Review Mechanism (TPRM) and welcome the conclusions of the 7th Appraisal of the TPRM. Transparency is a key feature of the multilateral trading system since trade policy reviews and other transparency provisions of the

WTO Agreements assist Members in regularly reviewing and improving their trade policies and measures. However, the discussions on transparency should take into account the capacity constraints of Developing and Least-Developed Members including the Arab countries, and must not add new obligations to Members that are not within the scope of the existing agreements.

26. **We reiterate** the importance of recognizing the Arabic language as one of the official working languages in the WTO and the need to strive towards its inclusion in the WTO, as it is the case in the United Nations Organizations. Arabic is one of the most spoken native languages in the world; accordingly, the recognition of Arabic as a WTO working language would facilitate active participation and enhance integration of Arab States in the multilateral trading system.
 27. **We reaffirm** the support to the League of Arab States' request for observer status in the Ministerial Conferences, councils, bodies and committees of the World Trade Organization.
 28. **We underscore** the real need to ensure that any request by an Intergovernmental Organization (IGO) to acquire a permanent and/or ad hoc Observer Status in the WTO should be based on the technical merits of such request. We also believe that all Intergovernmental Organizations (IGOs) should be treated on an equal footing, and that the process of considering their participation in Ministerial Conferences should remain technical, transparent and objective, as well as the screening process shall be undertaken on the basis of Annex III of the rules of procedure of the Ministerial Conference.
 29. **We assert** our continued and unwavering support for the State of Palestine's request for observer status in the General Council and its subsidiary bodies. While being mindful of the fact that the Government of Palestine practices trade regulations in all areas covered by WTO law. Members are encouraged to provide a favorable consideration to Palestine's request for observer status at the General Council. In order to enhance the inclusive nature of the WTO, we are of the view that request for observer status cannot be denied on the basis of political considerations.
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