



United Nations Environment Programme

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PROGRAMME DES NATIONS UNIES POUR L'ENVIRONNEMENT • PROGRAMA DE LAS NACIONES UNIDAS PARA EL MEDIO AMBIENTE
ПРОГРАММА ОРГАНИЗАЦИИ ОБЪЕДИНЕННЫХ НАЦИЙ ПО ОКРУЖАЮЩЕЙ СРЕДЕ

PRESS RELEASE

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Environmental Issues make Significant Progress at Key Trade Talks

Nairobi, 15 November 2001 - Environment, fighting poverty and the push towards sustainable development have moved towards the centre of the international trade debate following the historic Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Doha, Qatar.

For the first time, trade ministers from over 140 countries have firmly accepted that globalization of trade and the reduction of trade barriers must take into account environmental issues and the development needs of some of the world's poorer countries.

Ministers also took some first, critical, steps towards reducing or phasing out so called "perverse subsidies" in areas such as fisheries. Subsidies amounting to \$15 billion a year distort trade, contribute to the decline and in some cases the collapse of fish stocks, and cause broader impacts on the marine environment.

Klaus Toepfer, Executive director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), said he was optimistic that the new round of trade talks, based on the agreements in Doha, offered real hope for delivering fairer and more environmentally friendly trade.

"Negotiations on trade and the environment were, until recently, a taboo subject in the WTO. But the Ministerial Declaration issued in Qatar has shown that countries are now willing to address these complex links between the need to liberalize trade and the need to protect the world's forests, fisheries, wetlands, wildlife and other precious natural resources," he said.

"We still have a long way to go. But the agreements in Doha are, I believe, a new beginning. I am particularly pleased that trade ministers have acknowledged the role UNEP can play in charting a more environmentally friendly and sustainable course in world trade," said Mr Toepfer.

The Declaration, agreed late on Wednesday evening, states: "We welcome the WTO's continued cooperation with UNEP and other inter-governmental organizations. We

encourage efforts to promote cooperation between the WTO and relevant international environmental and developmental organizations, especially in the lead-up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development to be held in Johannesburg, South Africa, in September 2002".

"UNEP stands ready to assist trade ministers in these issues and in the run up to the Johannesburg summit. I applaud the ministers for recognizing the importance of the summit on which the hopes of billions of people, especially in the developing world and particularly in Africa, are hanging, "said Mr Toepfer.

"We need to use trade to lift large numbers of people out of poverty while maintaining and promoting a healthy, clean and environmentally sound planet. UNEP is keenly aware that we must champion the cause of the environment wisely. It is important to ensure that increases in incomes, as a result of trade liberalization, do not occur at the expense of the environment. But it is equally important to have safeguards so that countries do not use the environment as an excuse for banning imports, so called 'green protectionism', " he added.

Mr Toepfer also stressed the need to help countries develop the ability to assess the environmental impacts of trade and trade policies. UNEP has substantial expertise here and the usefulness of such assessments is recognised in the Ministerial Declaration. The declaration also commits countries to negotiate on the relationship between WTO rules and trade obligations contained in multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), such as the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).

UNEP, together with the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) has created the Capacity Building Task Force on Trade, Environment and Development (CBTF). This is responding to demands of developing countries for specific capacity building activities in this complex, political, area.

More than 50 proposals have been received. Eight projects are underway. More will be funded if UNEP and UNCTAD succeed in attracting more financial support from governments, and in particular development cooperation agencies.

The Ministerial Declaration also recognises the importance of helping the Least Developed Countries achieve access to world markets so they can reach a fair share of world trade.

"This has important environmental implications too. A country needs a level of prosperity to be able to tackle environmental threats and issues. Countries overwhelmed by poverty and debt often cannot invest in environmentally friendly activities or technologies. If this new round of trade talks can raise the standards of living for these severely disadvantaged nations, then we can also make real progress on delivering clean air, clean water and clean land for their citizens," said Mr Toepfer.

Notes to Editors: The Doha World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference took place between November 9 and 14 in Qatar. Discussions finally ended at around 6pm in the evening of the 14th.

The Final Ministerial Declaration is available on line at: http://www-chil.wto-ministerial.org/english/thewto_e/minist_e/min01_e/min01_e.htm

The conference marks the beginning of a new round of trade talks most of which must be concluded no later than 1 January 2005.

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UNEP News Release 01/111