

WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

WT/MIN(05)/11
13 December 2005

(05-0000)

MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE
Sixth Session
Hong Kong, 13 - 18 December 2005

Original: English

**ADDRESS BY THE HONOURABLE DONALD TSANG, GBM
CHIEF EXECUTIVE
HONG KONG, CHINA**

First of all, I wish to extend a warm Hong Kong welcome to all of you. Hong Kong, China is deeply honoured to be the host of the Sixth Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation.

This week, under this very roof, we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to enhance the existing international trading environment; to generate wealth on a broader and deeper scale globally; and, most important of all, to help alleviate the pain of poverty for millions of people living in the poorer parts of this world. I am pleased that Hong Kong, China is today at the centre of this admirable enterprise.

I cannot emphasise strongly enough the importance of the WTO. It is the only international organization that deals with the rules of trade between economies. It is the rules-based forum at which 149 Member Economies negotiate agreements and resolve disputes over trade issues.

The WTO is also a powerful force in countering the currents of protectionism and discrimination which are responsible to a large extent for the economic hardship suffered by less wealthy and less well-endowed economies. And, ultimately, the WTO is a key component in the global effort to attain the United Nations' Millennium Goal of Development in tackling the scourge of poverty and hunger.

Nor can I over-emphasise the importance of the WTO to Hong Kong. As a small, externally-oriented economy with no natural resources other than a magnificent deep water port, Hong Kong has relied on free trade and an entrepreneurial and hardworking population to transform this once sleepy fishing village into an international and regional business hub.

So I urge you to take some time during the next few days, and after the conference if you can, to look around our great city. You will see why President Bill Clinton once described Hong Kong as Exhibit A in the case for global interdependence and its benefits.

As a free trader, our support for the multilateral trading system is unconditional. And it goes back a long way. We became a separate Contracting Party to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade in 1986. We were a founding Member of the WTO in 1995. Our Membership did not change after reunification in 1997. Indeed, Hong Kong's continued participation in the WTO, and in international trade agreements under the name "Hong Kong, China", is enshrined in the Basic Law, the constitution of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. We treasure the certainty, protection and benefits that the WTO brings to our economy and community.

We offered to host this Sixth WTO Ministerial Conference because we recognized that it would become a key staging post to the successful conclusion of the multilateral trade negotiations under the Doha Development Agenda. We want to play our part in the collective effort to realize the

ambitions of the Round. We regard the WTO Members' acceptance of our offer as a recognition of our contribution to the multilateral trading system, and an acknowledgement of our competence as a world city in handling whatever challenges that may arise from the Ministerial Conference.

We in Hong Kong are determined to make this important event a success. Secretary John Tsang is committed to creating an environment of comfort for all delegates to conduct negotiations freely, frankly and constructively in the coming days. He has travelled the globe taking part in many of the key meetings which have paved the way for the negotiations that will take place over the next few days.

Thousands of men and women in our community — civil servants, legislators, District Councillors, NGO members, business leaders, service providers, volunteers, and citizens of Hong Kong — have been working tirelessly since the WTO accepted our offer to host this Conference two years ago. We have a common objective: we want to stage a Conference that is well organized, transparent, inclusive, and above all, efficient. The fruits of this community-wide endeavour are now before you.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are at an historic juncture. Trade liberalization and economic growth is a permanent goal for all of us as WTO Members. While I acknowledge that in some parts of the world this goal is seen as a threat rather than an opportunity, the negotiations under the Doha Development Agenda must press ahead. We must vigorously defend the integrity and effectiveness of the multilateral trading system.

This Conference is a golden opportunity for us to demonstrate our collective resolve to improve the lives of peoples throughout the world through progressive trade liberalization. That is what we committed ourselves to do when the Round was launched four years ago in Doha.

This week, all eyes are on Hong Kong. As host and Chair of the Conference, we will do our utmost to bring about a successful outcome. But we cannot do it ourselves. We are relying on your support and commitment to accomplish this mission. I am sure it will be forthcoming.
