

G-77 will speak with one voice in WTO, says chairman

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HAVANA, Sun: The Third World's Group of 77 countries will speak with "one voice" in the World Trade Organisation after a presidential summit ended with the decision to give the bloc a new decision-making body, the G-77's chairman said yesterday.

"One of the practical new things you will see is that the G-77 will speak with one voice, in a way in which it probably has not spoken before," Nigeria's President Olusegun Obasanjo told a news conference here the day after the conclusion of the G-77 and China's first presidential summit.

The directorate, whose precise powers will be defined in the next three months, will include high-profile leaders like Obasanjo, South Africa's President, Mr Thabo Mbeki, and Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Heads of state and senior ministers from the G-77's 133 member countries — which include developing nation heavyweights like Indonesia, China, Nigeria and South Africa — decided that the G-77 needed a political directorate to ensure that the group's decisions translate into practical action.

One of its major tasks will be ensuring a unified G-77 voice in the World Trade Organisation (WTO), where the G-77's numbers grant it considerable clout.

The G-77 believes that rich countries have tried to hijack the WTO for their own interests: forcing through free trade in high-technology goods and services while refusing to open the doors to poorer countries' farm and textile exports.

Obasanjo said that the directorate will not be able to force G-77 members to

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vote as it decides, but stressed that the new executive body will work hard to find common stands agreeable to all the group's members.

"I would not say that — if you do not agree with what we have suggested of We

have recommended — that you will no longer be a member of the G-77. But I will expect that all members after due consultation will want to go along with it," he said in a reply to a question by reporters.

Obasanjo said the summit marked the rebirth of the G-77, which was founded in

1964 to safeguard the interests of developing and newly independent nations in the United Nations.

In a sign of the new high profile the group desires, Obasanjo and Mbeki will travel to the next Group of Eight summit in July to inform the world's richest and most powerful nations

of G-77 views. Obasanjo said that the rich had to understand that it had to take the interests of the poor majority into account. "There are leaders in the North who realise that what we in the South are trying to do is in the best interests of the world," he said. — Reuters

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