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WTO-ACCESS

NEW ROUND WILL NOT GUARANTEE MARKET ACCESS, SAYS MARTIN KHOR

By: Mikhail Raj Abdullah

KAMPALA, Aug 21 (Bernama) -- African countries must not be duped into agreeing to a new round of negotiations at the ministerial meeting of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) at Doha in November.

Claims by proponents for a new round that it would provide meaningful access to Northern markets in agriculture, textiles and other sectors are unfounded, Third World Network director, Martin Khor said.

Addressing the Global 2001 Smart Partnership International Dialogue here today, he said that given the poor record of the North in not keeping to their commitments, there was no guarantee of market access at all.

They were also making such claims just to get developing countries to accept the entrance of the new issues into the WTO, he said during deliberations on "Smartening up to the WTO - Towards a Two-Way Street" chaired by Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

"Nothing could be further from the truth," he said.

Khor said that new agreements and obligations in these new areas would be very detrimental to developing countries which would find even more of their development options closed off

He said it was inappropriate for new issues such as investment, competition, government procurement to be brought in to Doha in November as the WTO is a multilateral trade body which makes and enforces rules pertaining to trade.

"It should stick to its mandate for dealing with trade issues," he said.

He said that developed countries would like to bring in many non-trade issues into the WTO, not because it would strengthen the trade system, but because it would enable them to make use of the WTO's enforcement system to bring countries to the dispute settlement system and impose trade sanctions.

Developing countries would be at a great disadvantage and lose a great deal of their economic sovereignty and their ability to make national policies of their own regarding economic, financial, social and political issues.

Khor said that the real aim of developed countries was to enable their big corporations free entry into the markets of developing countries.

Governments in the South would lose the ability to regulate the entry and operations of foreign firms and to give preferences to locals in policies or contracts.

This is the aim of the investment, competition and procurement issues.

On the other hand, the labour and environmental standards issues could lay the ground for new forms of protectionism against developing countries' products and firms through high standards.

The introduction of these new issues is the essence of what the developed countries mean by launching a "comprehensive new round."

"The issue is what makes the new round new for them. They give the wrong impression that without these new issues, the WTO will lose dynamism or have nothing to discuss.

"But this is not true as the WTO agenda is already full even without the new issues," Khor said, emphasising that the Doha ministerial meeting should not launch a new round with new issues. -- BERNAMA

MR MKO KTC