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MAHATHIR-DIALOGUE

MAHATHIR, CHISSANO CHOSEN TO BE SPOKESMEN OF DEVELOPING NATIONS

By Mikhail Raj Abdullah

EZULWINI (Swaziland), Aug 17 (Bernama) - In what is seen as a reaffirmation of his international statesmanship, Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, along with African Union Chairman President Joachim Chissano of Mozambique have been chosen to be the voice of developing countries to speak on global issues at international fora by southern African heads of government.

Dr Mahathir's immediate task would be to present the views and interests of developing countries to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) headquarters in Geneva ahead of the ministerial meeting in Cancun, Mexico, which starts on Sept 10.

The idea is for the voice of developing nations to be heard as a grouping and not ignored.

King Mswati III of Swaziland, who hosted the Global 2003 Smart Partnership International Dialogue which ended here Saturday, said in his concluding remarks to eight other heads of governments that Dr Mahathir would champion the interests of developing countries against moves by developed countries to marginalise their (developing countries) trading interests.

Another key development during the three-day dialogue was the conferment of Fellow Emeritus of the Commonwealth Partnership for Technology Development (CPTM) on Dr Mahathir, a move welcomed by African leaders, who regard him as the prime mover behind the smart partnership dialogue and whose valuable contribution would still be sought after he stepped down as prime minister.

The leaders also decided that Zambia would tentatively host the next smart partnership dialogue.

Besides Dr Mahathir, who is also Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the heads of government who attended the dialogue were from Botswana, Mozambique, South Africa, Namibia, Uganda, Swaziland and Zimbabwe.

Commenting on his being chosen as the voice of developing countries, Dr Mahathir said he would put forward the Ezulwini Statement on a Just Regime in Global Trade Through Smart Partnership Dialogue because the actions of "outside countries" were impacting on the development and progress of developing countries.

"We are to give our views as a group," he told Malaysian journalists at a press conference here after the end of the dialogue.

The leaders here unanimously agreed that it was necessary for the smart partnership members to voice their views on the WTO, in particular on the possible outcome of the forthcoming 5th ministerial WTO meeting in Cancun.

"Alone, these countries cannot manage it (to put forth their views) as many of them depend on international agencies such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund as well as the United States' market for their products such as textiles. As such, they find it difficult to confront the developed countries individually," said Dr Mahathir who later left for Damascus in Syria late Saturday night.

An important issue to be brought before the WTO by the developing countries is for developed countries to open their own markets fully to goods and services from developing countries if the latter are expected to participate in trade liberalisation.

The Ezulwini statement also said export subsidies and domestic support

to farmers, combined with tariff peaks and escalation, have had a negative impact not only on poverty alleviation but also on the development and industrialisation of developing countries.

The leaders also said that "no country may devise and apply protectionist and discriminatory non-tariff barriers and that trade should be completely disassociated from non-trade issues such as democracy, human rights, labour practices and natural environment as there were other fora for such issues.

At the same time, they said that Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) should not be applied equally between countries of different stages of development while social (health) factors should be given full consideration in the application of the IPR.

Also, the "Development Round" of the WTO should in fact be concerned with development and that trade conditionalities should actually promote and not detract from development.

"There must be progress on Special and Differential Treatment," the leaders said.

They also fully endorsed their views that negotiations in the WTO should be democratic and that decisions by a privileged few should be regarded as non-binding on the rest.

"New issues should not be brought up until satisfactory conclusions are reached on the present agenda," they stressed.

The leaders also said they believed in the role of the WTO in bringing about fair and rule-based trade, but the decisions by the trade body should reflect democratically the views of the "have-nots as much as the haves."

"We insist on fairness and justice in world trade for everyone," they said in their statement. - BERNAMA

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