

14 AUG 2003
SAID-WTO
HEADS OF GOVT WILL PRESENT STATEMENT TO WTO

By: Mikhail Raj Abdullah

MBABANE, (Swaziland), Aug 14 (Bernama) -- The nine heads of government including Malaysia attending the Southern Africa International Dialogue (SAID) are expected to issue an "Ezulwini Statement" to the upcoming World Trade Organisation (WTO) ministerial meeting in Cancun next month calling for developed countries not to renege on their commitments to liberalise trade in areas vital to Third World economies.

Opening the Global 2003 Smart Partnership International Dialogue Wednesday night, King Mswati III, said that the Ezulwini Statement is expected to contain an appeal to the developed nations, especially the US, and the European Union, not to backtrack on their commitments made at the last WTO meeting in Doha to enable cheaper drugs to be made in Africa and cutting down on farm subsidies.

Also present at the opening was Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad who later delivered a keynote address to the more than 600 participants from 16 countries.

Mswati said that the statement would include recommendations of the dialogue being held at the Ezulwini dialogue village near here.

Officials involved in the smart partnership dialogue said there were fears that the WTO Ministerial Meeting which begins on Sept 10 in Cancun, Mexico, was going to collapse.

Reports describe the US and Europe as having taken a very hard stand on some negotiating issues such as the production and manufacture of cheap drugs to combat HIV-AIDS, for instance in Africa.

Although the US and Europe agreed at the last ministerial in Doha to allow African countries to produce these badly-needed drugs cheaply, they were now backtracking on their Doha commitments, coming under pressure from powerful pharmaceutical lobbies.

They are now insisting African and developing countries to buy the expensive drugs, something impossible simply because impoverished Africans just cannot afford it.

"The US and Europe are backtracking and people are dying here," an official who requested anonymity said.

Even in the sensitive area of agriculture, both the US and Europe were increasing their subsidies to farmers, thus making it impossible for African farmers to compete on an equitable manner with heavily-subsidised American and European farm products.

Mswati also said that the smart partnership dialogue would be discussing progress towards making the organisation body -- the Commonwealth Partnership for Technology Management (CPTM) -- self-sustaining and viable for the foreseeable future through the creation of an endowment fund, to the tune of 11 million pounds.

He also said that organising a smart partnership dialogue undertaken on an equal, non-confrontational platform, was a sure recipe for progress.

He also stressed that the dialogue had no political points to score, no hidden agendas, no direct reporting of the interaction.

The stage is set for a concentrated three days of thought and talk about three smart partnership contexts namely Geopolitics, economics and technology.

The king said that in a world full of strife and superpowers waging war, it was important for countries to look to ways to employ dialogue and diplomacy for a smarter and peaceful globe. -- BERNAMA

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