

15 AUG 2003

EZULWINI-STATEMENT

THIRD WORLD LEADERS ISSUE STRONG STATEMENT ON WTO MARKET ACCESS

EZULWINI, Aug 15 (Bernama) -- Leaders of developing countries have issued a strong statement to the World Trade Organization (WTO) ministerial meeting in Cancun, Mexico, next month, demanding equal market access for products from both developed and developing countries.

In what is surely the firmest-ever unified stance taken by developing countries, the leaders said in the "Ezulwini Statement" to the WTO that there would be "no access for the products of the developed countries unless equal access is given to the products of developing countries."

The leaders, who are here for the Global 2003 Smart Partnersip International Dialogue, demanded in a draft copy of the statement obtained by journalists that "negotiations in the WTO must be democratic."

"Decisions by a privileged few must be regarded as non-binding on the rest" and "that new issues should not be brought up until satisfactory conclusions are reached on the present agenda," the leaders of Malaysia, Botswana, South Africa, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, Sudan, Uganda and Zimbabwe, said in the statement.

Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, in comments made in preparations for the final statement, said that the action of countries outside the smart partnership dialogue had impacted on the development and progress of these countries in negotiations in the WTO.

International Trade and Industry Minister, Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz would lead the Malaysian delegation to the crucial talks beginning Sept 10.

Some officials at the dialogue said there was fear that the WTO talks might collapse as developed countries such as the United States and the European Union were backtracking on commitments made at their last meeting in Doha in areas such as liberalising trade in drugs and agricultural products.

The Ezulwini Statement said that "no country may devise and apply non-tariff barriers without the approval of trading partners."

They said that trade should be completely disassociated from non-trade issues such as democracy, human rights and labour practices as there were other fora to discuss these issues.

Besides this, the leaders said that Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) should not be applied equally between countries at different stages of development.

For instance, they said that social (health) factors must be given full consideration in the application of IPR.

They insisted that the "Development Round" should in fact be concerned with development and that trade conditions should promote and not detract from development.

"There must be progress on Special and Differential treatment, the statement added.

Dr Mahathir said that developing countries believed in the role of the WTO in bringing about fair trade.

"But the decision by the WTO must reflect democratically the view of the 'haven't as much as the haves'."

The Prime Minister said that "the members of the Smart Partnership movement, while representing ourselves, also largely represent the views of the countries where we come from."

"We insist on fairness and justice in world trade for everyone in this world," he said. -- BERNAMA

MR KTC