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Dr M, Chissano to be Dialogue's spokesmen at WTO

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and African Union chairman and Mozambique President Joachim Chissano have been chosen by leaders of developing countries attending the Southern Africa International Dialogue to be their spokesmen in the World Trade Organisation.

The unanimous decision was made at a lunch meeting convened by King Mswati III of Swaziland yesterday.

Dr Mahathir, speaking to Malaysian journalists, said the WTO Ministerial meeting in Cancun, Mexico, next month provided leaders with the impetus to their extensive discussion on the trade issues that gravely affect developing countries.

Their stand had been put on paper and that it was now Dr Mahathir's job and Chissano's to bring it up through the proper channel.

The leaders yesterday issued the "Ezulwini Statement on Just Regime in Global Trade Through Smart Partnership Dialogue" and made a strong stand in urging the WTO to ensure fairness and justice in world trade for everyone. The contents of the statement was totally a Malaysian stand except minor adjustments made in the language.

The leaders stated that there shouldn't be access for the products of developed countries unless equal access was given to the products of developing countries.

They did not want any country to be allowed to devise and apply non-tariff barriers without the approval of trading partners.

They demanded that trade be completely dissociated from non-trade issues such as democracy, human rights and labour practices. There are other fora for these issues, they maintained. On intellectual property rights, they said it should not be applied equally between countries at different stages of development.

Some developing nations were dependent on the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and developed countries for assistance.

"Because of that they want to have a common statement. Some of them are under pressure because of their obligations to WTO, IMF and developed countries," Dr Mahathir said.

In recognition of his contribution to the Commonwealth Partnership Technology Management Movement from its inception, Dr Mahathir has been conferred the status of Fellow Emeritus.

The next Southern African international dialogue will be held in Zambia in early 2005.