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Leaders to urge WTO to ensure fairness, justice in world trade

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LEADERS of the developing countries who are attending the Southern Africa International Dialogue are expected to make a strong stand in the "Ezulwini Statement" urging the World Trade Organisation to ensure fairness and justice in world trade for everyone.

In a strong message to the WTO, the leaders are expected to draw the attention of the WTO that market access is only meaningful for products which the developing countries produce.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, when deliberating Malaysia's stand on the issue at a session touching on the WTO on Thursday, said there shouldn't be access for the products of the developed countries unless equal access was given to the products of developing countries.

Malaysia also wanted no country to be allowed to devise and apply nontariff barriers without the approval of trading partners.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia would also demand that trade be completely disassociated from non-trade issues such as democracy, human rights and labour practices. There are other fora for these issues.

Intellectual property rights should not be applied equally between countries at different stages of development. Social (health) factors must be given full consideration in the application of IPR.

Malaysia also made a stand that the "Development Round" should be concerned with development and that trade conditionalities should promote development. There should also be progress on Special and Differential treatment and negotiation in the WTO must be democratic.

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.

The Smart Partnership warrant, which has the participation and support of Heads of States and Governments and Ministers of several countries in Southern, Eastern and Western Africa together with countries of Southeast Asia and the Caribbean with the participation of the private sectors, labour and media, has been meeting frequently to discuss Smart Partnership and dialogue for the progress of their countries.

Inevitably, Dr Mahathir said, the international environment and the action of countries outside the partnership has had an impact on the development and progress of these countries and this included the WTO.

"We therefore deem it necessary that the partnership voice its views on the WTO, in particular at the forthcoming Cancun Ministerial meeting."

Dr Mahathir said developing countries believed in the role of the WTO in bringing about fair and rule-based trade. But the decision by the WTO, he said, must reflect democratically the view of the have-nots as much as the haves.

"We, 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."

The strong stand by the countries taking part in the Smart Partnership dialogue raises fears that the four-day WTO Ministerial Meeting beginning Sept 10 in Mexico is going to collapse.

It has been indicated that the United States and Europe will be taking 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 meeting in Doha to allow African countries to produce these drugs cheaply, they were now backtracking on their Doha commitments.

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

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.