

15/08/2003

Sending 'no reneging' note to WTO

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COUNTRIES participating in the Southern Africa International Dialogue here will send a strong message to the World Trade Organisation that the United States and Europe must not renege on commitments to the developing countries.

King Mswati III indicated in his opening speech on Wednesday that participating countries in the dialogue will submit an "Ezulwini Statement" to the ministerial meeting of the WTO next month with recommendations on trade and globalisation issues.

He, however, did not provide any details on the statement.

According to Commonwealth Partnership Technology Management chairman Tan Sri Omar Abdul Rahman, the leaders had discussed the contents of the statement yesterday (Thursday).

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, he said, had told other leaders that he was quite happy with the contents and several other leaders have also given their comments on the statement.

"The leaders are fine tuning the statement and we expect the Ezulwini Statement to be issued on Friday, the earliest," said Omar.

The heads of state and government would further deliberate on the issue again today.

Dr Mahathir, who delivered a speech which centred on globalisation issues on Wednesday, was among the leaders who actively enlightened participants on the trade issues.

Observers said that there were fears that the four-day WTO Ministerial Meeting from Sept 10 in Cancun, Mexico, would collapse without reaching decisions.

It has been indicated that the US and Europe will take a very strong stand on some negotiating issues such as the production 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 badly-needed drugs cheaply, they are now backtracking on their commitment following pressure from powerful pharmaceutical groups, and are insisting African and developing countries buy the expensive drugs. However, impoverished African nations 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 in an equitable manner with heavily-subsidised American and European farm products.

Meanwhile, King Mswati, in his speech, said the dialogue would also be charting a way forward with conclusions reached and initiatives agreed to promote a smooth passage for the movement into the future.

"We will also discuss progress towards making the Commonwealth Partnership Technology Management (CPTM) self-sustaining and viable for the foreseeable future, through the creation of an endowment fund," he added.

He said the smart partnership dialogues have taken on special significance.

"These annual events are unique in the way they bring together the principal actors in development, in a relaxed atmosphere that lends itself to lively discussions.

"There are 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 - geopolitics, economics and technology.

"And as we meet and discuss, we do so as individuals, dropping our nationalities, agendas and corporate identities so that there are no inhibitions."

King Mswati said the whole of Swaziland has really been caught up in the spirit of smart partnership and he was overwhelmed by the generosity and commitment of a great number of Swazi individuals and companies.

"They came forward and made their commitments, great and small, according to their means. This included a young boy who gave us a number of chickens as an expression of his desire to be part of this historic moment for Swaziland. This was truly a smart co-operative national effort," he said.