

Final

**NATIONAL STATEMENT FOR GENERAL DEBATE AT UNCTAD XII, TUESDAY 22 APRIL 2008 AT 1000HRS**

The global economy had grown rapidly for the last 5 years, with much of the developing world experiencing strong exports and unprecedented economic growth. This had boosted employment and reduced poverty within the developing region. In fact, UNCTAD XI had met in Sao Paulo in 2004 amidst the build-up of that global economic boom.

2           Unfortunately, UNCTAD XII in Accra is taking place against a bleaker backdrop. There has been a slowdown in the US, the world's number one engine of economic growth. Growth in global trade has fallen, from an annualised rate of 7% in 2007, to close to zero in the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2008.

3           Given the current economic climate, and the real possibility of the WTO Doha Round collapsing, it is not unthinkable that a resurgence of protectionism could ensue. This would seriously hurt every country, and more so, developing countries. UNCTAD XII could not have come at a more opportune time for us to reaffirm our commitment to trade and development.

4           I will first speak a little about the theme for UNCTAD XII, that is, addressing the challenges and opportunities of globalisation for development. It is not wrong to say that globalisation poses its own set of challenges by intensifying economic competition and forcing the pace of change. Smaller developing countries, in particular, feel these pressures more acutely, given that the fast-moving global markets are mainly driven by major economies.

5           However, as the theme aptly recalls, globalisation is also about

opportunities. It is as important, if not MORE important, that we recognise this. If properly marshalled, globalisation can potentially level the playing field for developing countries, and lift millions around the world from dire poverty. Take China and India as examples. Both have decided to confront the challenges of globalisation and seek ways to best harness the opportunities presented.

6           Once we recognise that globalisation does afford opportunities to the developing world, the key question would be how best to spread the fruits to the weakest and most vulnerable. Special attention must be paid to sub-Saharan Africa, termed by the UN Secretary-General as the “epicentre of a development emergency”.

7           How can we help developing countries benefit from globalisation? Let me offer two suggestions. First, we can do this by sharing developmental experiences, and building capacities in these countries through technical cooperation appropriate to each of these developing countries’ unique stage of development. We recognise of course that every country must take primary responsibility for its own development. The role of national policies and development strategies in order to achieve this development cannot be over-emphasised. But developing countries need to learn how to, for instance, participate in trade negotiations, and to formulate nationally-owned trade policies in a way which can make better use of the opportunities open to them through the multilateral trading system and the global market. Specifically, the WTO’s Aid-for-Trade initiative includes such assistance.

8           Singapore believes in the philosophy of sharing of experiences. Our own developmental experience underpins our support for the Aid-for-

Trade initiative. In fact, Singapore has our own unique initiative known as the Singapore Cooperation Programme, or SCP for short. Since its inception in 1992, Singapore has been organising technical assistance programmes on trade policies and regulations to equip developing countries with the requisite knowledge on trade opportunities and skills to access them. In fact, as much as 80% or more of our SCP programmes are aimed, directly or indirectly, at enhancing countries' capacities to participate more effectively in the multilateral trading system. To date, the SCP has trained more than 54,000 participants from more than 168 countries. An example of one of the more prominent projects would have to be our collaboration with the Botswana Government to set up the Botswana National Productivity Centre in January 1993 in Gaborone. The centre has since become a regional training centre for productivity issues in Southern Africa.

9 In addition to the SCP, Singapore also launched a new initiative known the Singapore Cooperation Enterprise, or SCE in short, in May 2006. Like the SCP, the SCE was set up to share our public sector experience on a wide range of issues, from high-level policy formulation to the practical implementation of government wide programmes and initiatives. The SCE works as a non-profit service provider, providing expertise to foreign governments who wish to tap on our public sector experience for their own developmental needs.

10 While no one-size-fits-all policy model exists since each country has its own unique geographical, political, economic, cultural and social make-up, developing countries can still find the developmental experiences of others useful through adapting the best practices for success, and avoiding the

pitfalls of mistakes that others have made .

11        Second, in order to spread the fruits of globalisation to all, including the weakest and most vulnerable, so to speak, we have to ensure that the international environment for trade remains conducive for these developing countries to participate in. For one, the WTO must not be allowed to fail. As a rules-based multilateral trading system, the WTO provides stability and predictability, and protects the smaller developing countries from unfair discrimination and illegal unilateral actions.

12        Singapore's own developmental story is a testament to the viability of the two suggestions I made earlier. For many years after our independence in 1965, we were fortunate to have friends in other countries who shared their developmental experiences with us and helped us develop our trade capacity and prepared us for the global market. With our tiny domestic market and lack of natural resources, we would never have been able to do well, let alone survive, on a less open global economy without a rules-based multilateral trading system.

13        Economic growth is an essential precondition in the global fight against poverty, and globalisation can certainly be a tremendous force for good. The key is to manage it in such a way that will maximise the benefits for all, especially the developing world.

Thank you.

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